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MANY JUNES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HOUSE OF MERRILEES
RICHARD BALDOCK
EXTON MANOR
THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER
THE ELDEST SON
THE HONOUR OF THE CLINTONS
THE GREATEST OF THESE
THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH
WATERMEADS
UPSIDONIA
ABINGTON ABBEY
THE GRAFTONS
THE CLINTONS, AND OTHERS
SIR HARRY
MANY JUNES

MANY JUNES

BY

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

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To

MRS. ARNOLD GLOVER

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MANY JUNES

CHAPTER I

THE ADMIRAL

"INDEED, Sophia, you will do nothing of the sort," said old Lady Wilkinson. "I am aware that you are afraid of the Admiral, and I have always told you that you were very foolish to be so. But to fear a person is one thing, and to run away from him is another. You will just sit in your place and drink your tea; and if I wish, for any reason, to speak alone with him—which I do not anticipate—I will tell you, and you can then leave the room. Have your tea in the morning-room, indeed! I never heard of such a thing."

She was a tiny fresh-faced old lady, with sparkling eyes and the whitest of hair, and sat as upright in her easy-chair as if she had never known the use of a cushion. Her daughter, if she had a will of her own, had reached the age of five and forty without having exercised it in opposition to the old lady's imperious rule, and, although she looked unhappy and uncomfortable, made no effort to enforce it now.

"I have reason to dislike a man who has treated me with such brutality and discourtesy as Horace has

done," she said. "It is simply that. It is not true to say that I fear him, mother."

"It *is* true, Sophia," persisted the old lady, her snowy curls shaking with the vehemence of her nod. "And to talk of brutality and discourtesy is simply ridiculous. You are always dwelling upon that foolish old grievance. The fact is, you always lorded it over poor Emily before she was married, and when you went to stay with her as a bride you tried to continue the practice. Horace caught you at it and turned you out of the house. And well you deserved it. I do not deny that he is a martinet. Every man has a right to be, in his own house. Your dear father was the same, and I never complained. But that is a different thing from brutality, as you call it, and I am quite sure that the Admiral was not brutal. Your nature is an overbearing one, Sophia, and for once you got punished for it."

Poor Miss Wilkinson—meek, downcast, and distressed under this exordium—displayed as little as possible of the overbearing disposition laid to her charge. Nor had she displayed it very strongly on the occasion which had led to her being requested to leave her brother-in-law's house some twenty years before. But Admiral Lelacheur certainly was something of a martinet, and had taken advantage of a very mild attempt at interference in his domestic concerns on her part to rid himself of her presence, not being quite able to tell her that he disliked her and didn't want her in his house; and he had done so in such a way that she had never

again visited her sister up to the time of that sister's death, a few years later.

The two ladies were sitting in a pleasant old-fashioned upstairs drawing-room, whose bow windows faced the sea, looking across the broad road and the parade on the other side of it, now fairly crowded with carriages and promenaders—for it was four o'clock on a fine spring afternoon and there was plenty of interest, and even some excitement, to be gained from behind Lady Wilkinson's drawing-room windows. The house was on the Marina at St. Leonards-on-Sea, which in those days was much occupied by well-to-do people in her position in life, who had each their carriage and pair, and everything else necessary for an existence of extreme comfort and such mild degree of state as was agreeable to them.

"There goes Mrs. Bellamy," said the old lady, whose chair was placed so that she could see everybody who passed along the road below. "She has on a new spring bonnet, and it is not the one she wore in church last Sunday. At her age two bonnets in one season are mere vanity, although I am aware that she could afford twenty. Sophia, I do hope the Admiral is not coming to say that he is going to take Anne away from us. You yourself are so quiet, and often so dismal, that it is a relief to have the child laughing and singing everywhere. I like youth about me, and I sometimes think that you were never young."

"Why should you think that Horace wants to take Anne away from us, mother?" asked Miss Wilkinson,

putting aside the personal application in the old lady's remarks with a slight shrug of her thin shoulders.

"Why do I think it? I wish you would use what brains the Almighty has given you, Sophia. You are aware, are you not, that the Admiral has retired, and is about to settle down somewhere? What more natural than that he should wish to have his children with him?"

"He might very well have had them before," replied Miss Wilkinson. "When he had a house at Portsmouth he never asked for Anne to go there. He has always appeared to want to keep Anne and Hugh apart. I am sure I don't know why."

"You don't know why? You know very well why. He has ideas of his own about the bringing up of children. He thinks that girls should be with women and boys with men. That is why he has left Anne to us so long. I do not quarrel with his ideas."

"I think they are most unreasonable, in the case of a little boy like Hugh, who was only a baby when Emily died. Of course he had to be with women, for some years."

"You are very dictatorial, Sophia. It is a habit that is growing on you. And you know very well that I should have liked at that time to have both the children. But Horace wanted his only son. It is only natural."

"Why would he never let him come here for his holidays when he was at school at Sanborough, and Horace was in Australia?"

"Because he——Ah! there is the Admiral. Ring the bell quickly, Sophia. We will have tea up at once. Bestir yourself, child, bestir yourself. Tut! you move like a snail."

There was nothing snail-like in the motions of the old lady herself, as she moved about the room like an elderly but still active bird and made ready for the visitor, who was of such importance that it would never have done to receive him quietly in her seat by the window. When he was announced she was sitting in another easy-chair, by the fire, but immediately rose from that to greet him, and not until the greeting was made settled down again on her perch.

Admiral Lelacheur was short and red faced, with square grizzled side whiskers, sharp blue eyes, and closely cropped grey hair. He looked like a sailor, even in his dark tweed clothes, and like a man used to command, though his figure was not impressive. He received the old lady's somewhat effusive greeting with curt unsmiling ceremony, and favoured Miss Wilkinson with a handshake that was finished almost before it was begun. Then he sat down by the fire and said: "Hope your lumbago's better, my lady."

"Lumbago!" she exclaimed. "I haven't had a touch of lumbago for the last four years. What can you be thinking of, Admiral?"

"It's four years since I saw you," he replied; "you'd had a touch of it then."

The old lady turned her birdlike head towards her daughter. "What a memory!" she said admiringly.

"Well, Horace, I think that was actually the last time there was anything the matter with me. I hope when you come to my age you will enjoy as good health as I do."

"I hope I shall," said the Admiral. "Where's Anne?"

"Anne will be in directly. I should have kept her at home, but it is the last class of the term, and——"

"Class! Term! You don't send her to school, eh?" He spoke sharply, with a half-frown at her underneath his bushy eyebrows. But his frown had no terrors for Lady Wilkinson.

"Didn't I tell you I should never send her to school?" she said.

"Yes, but——"

"Then don't ask foolish questions, Horace. She goes to a dancing class."

"Oh, dancing! What does she want to learn dancing for?"

"Because all young women must learn to dance and to hold themselves properly—that is, if there is an opportunity. Sophia, unfortunately, never had one. We were stationed at——"

"Well, never mind that, my lady," broke in the Admiral. "Anne will have to do without dancing classes and that sort of thing, now. I've bought a house, and she's to come and live with me."

"I feared it," said the old lady with a sigh. "But I think, Horace, you might have broken it to me a little more gently. I have grown very fond of the

child, and it will be a wrench for me to part with her."

"I'm sorry," said the Admiral. "But I say straight out what I've got to say. I don't believe in beating about the bush."

"I don't believe Anne will want to leave us," said Miss Wilkinson, stirred to gentle revolt. "We have done our best to make her happy, and I think we have succeeded."

The Admiral turned his fierce eyebrows on her. "What Anne wants or doesn't want is neither here nor there, Miss Wilkinson," he said. "She is coming to live with me."

"You needn't speak like that," said the old lady sharply. "You will do as you please, of course; but, considering that we have had the entire charge of the child for fifteen years, and this is the only home she has known, it would become you to announce your intentions rather more gently."

Four furrows dug themselves in the Admiral's brow and disappeared again. "I'm not ungrateful for what you have done," he said gruffly. "And I'll see that the child isn't ungrateful either. But——"

"Pooh!" interrupted the old lady again. "You needn't trouble yourself about that, my man. Anne behaves towards her grandmother as she should behave. She'll need no schooling from you. And I don't want gratitude from her. I want love, and I've got it. Whether you will get the same or not depends upon yourself. I hope you may."

"I shall get obedience," said the Admiral.

"If I didn't know that your bark was worse than your bite, Horace," said the old lady, "you shouldn't take the child at all, and I tell you so plainly. Now let me hear all about it. Where are you going to live and when will your house be ready?"

"I have bought a little property in Dorsetshire."

"Dorsetshire? Have you any family connection with that county?"

The furrows appeared again. "Family connection?" he echoed. "You know very well that I have no family connections whatever."

"I know that you quarrelled with your only brother thirty or forty years ago and have never spoken to him since, if that is what you mean."

The furrows came and stayed. "No one dares to mention that man's name to me," he said, after a pregnant pause. "He is no brother of mine."

"Hoity toity!" cried the old lady. "Who says 'dare' to me? Very well, then. You have no family connection with Dorsetshire. You have probably chosen that county because Sir Simeon Lelacheur lives in Suffolk, and Suffolk and Dorsetshire are a long way apart."

"I should certainly never think of visiting Suffolk again as long as I live."

"Quite so. I can read you and your obstinate ways, Horace, like a book. Very well, then, you have bought a house in Dorsetshire. On the coast, I suppose, so as not to cut yourself off from the sea?"

"I've had pretty nearly fifty years of the sea," said the Admiral. "I wouldn't live on the coast if you were to give me a place for nothing. I hate the sea. I want a quiet house, inland, with trees and birds and flowers, and plenty of air, and no smoke; and I've got it."

"Trees and birds and flowers! I've heard sailors talk like that before, and I know what happens. Unless you are more foolish than I take you for you won't be many miles from the sea."

"Foyle is about five miles from Lydmouth Harbour," said the Admiral, in a tone of indifference.

The old lady nodded her head in triumph. "You see, Sophia," she said. "I know what I'm talking about. I wish you had been born with half my brains. Well, Horace, tell us more about your house. What is its name?"

"Foyle Manor," replied the Admiral. "Oh, it's a nice enough little place—not big—pretty garden, and a few fields and a bit of shooting. I'm having it done up now. I shall take Anne there in a month—say the first of June. You can send her up to me in London, can't you?"

"Yes, I can send her up; though, as you have not visited me for four years, it would not have hurt you to come down here again. I'm an old woman now, Horace."

"You an old woman!" said the Admiral. "You're a good deal younger than I am, my lady. You'll live another twenty years."

"I don't wish to live another twenty years," said the old lady, not ill pleased with the compliment. "I don't complain, you'll observe, of your taking Anne from me after all these years, but I feel it none the less."

"I must say," put in Miss Wilkinson, "that I think it rather hard."

"Hold your tongue, Sophia," said the old lady promptly. "The man has a right to have his own daughter with him if he can give her a home. And her place is with her father as long as he treats her well, as I hope he means to do. And what about Hugh, Admiral?"

"Hugh will come home too. I shall give his tutor rooms in the lodge—don't want the fellow in the house."

"Well, I am glad that the two children are to be together at last, and that the boy will have a home. It has always seemed to me a most unsatisfactory proceeding, leaving the poor child practically homeless, as you have done."

"Hugh has been very well looked after. I wouldn't have him spoilt by petticoats—not that it much matters now. He's missed his chance in life, and nothing will put that straight."

"Missed his chance in life! What a ridiculous way to talk about a boy of fifteen or sixteen and just because he was refused for the navy."

The Admiral's red face grew purple, and to the four furrows were added a fifth. "Refused for the navy!" he repeated angrily. "And whose fault was it that he was refused for the navy? I tell you he could have

passed in top of them all if it hadn't been for that lazy incompetent scoundrel of a schoolmaster."

"It was not the schoolmaster's fault that the boy had measles at the time of the examination."

"It *was* his fault; or, if it wasn't, that was the first chance. He had another one, and then what must the confounded idiot do but send him up without taking the trouble to see that he was fit for it?"

"It was adenoids, was it not?"

"Adenoids!" repeated the Admiral, in a voice of concentrated scorn, as if his quarrel was with the word itself. "Just a little twopenny halfpenny operation and the boy was as right as anybody. And there's a fellow whose business it is in life to see that the boys entrusted to him have every chance—a fellow who has pocketed hundreds of pounds of my money for that thing alone—and he won't take the trouble to see if anything of that sort is the matter—leaves it to the Medical Board, if you please, and when they turn the boy back says he's sorry. Sorry be damned—begging your pardon, my lady, and yours, Miss Wilkinson. I'd have had the fellow put in prison for it if I could. A schoolmaster! I'd like to drown the whole race of schoolmasters. And I told him so too."

"It certainly was very annoying; but the navy is not the only career for a boy, after all. Hugh has plenty of time to prepare for some other profession. There's the army."

"The army!" echoed the Admiral. "No boy of mine wastes his time and money in the army."

"Indeed, it is a very fine service. No one says anything against the army in this house."

The Admiral grunted. Questioned further, he said that he didn't know what he was going to do with the boy yet. There was plenty of time. He would go on at present with his tutor. He certainly wouldn't go to school. For one thing he was too old, and he, the Admiral, had had enough of schoolmasters to last him his lifetime. Perhaps he should go to Cambridge—certainly not Oxford—the Admiral couldn't bear Oxford; his brother and his nephews had been at Oxford, though he did not give this as the reason for his dislike of that university. After that he would see. Hugh might possibly go into the Church for a year or two—if the Church kept its Protestant character, which seemed unlikely with all these posturing mountebanks about. If he behaved himself he would have Foyle after the Admiral's death, and enough money to live on. There was plenty of time to see how things turned out. Hugh was only sixteen.

"Just a year younger than Anne," said Lady Wilkinson. "Ah, there is a ring at the bell. I am sure, Admiral, you will say that Anne has grown."

Anne Lelacheur came into the room immediately afterwards. She was a tall slip of a girl, with dark hair and eyes, more of a child than a woman, in spite of her graceful, budding form. Her cheeks and her eyes were bright, and she came forward to greet her father without a trace of diffidence, if with no particular enthusiasm. She had not seen him for four years.

He allowed her to kiss him, and remarked that she had grown, and then told her, without any further preamble, that he was going to take her away from her grandmother's house to live with him in the country, and asked her how she would like it.

The girl sat on the arm of the old lady's chair, and put her arm round her. "I shall be very sorry to leave dear granny," she said; "but of course if you want me, father, I will come."

"Very well, then," said the Admiral, rising. "I shall take you down to Foyle with me on the first of June."

He was out of the room and out of the house within two minutes, in spite of expostulations and expressions of surprise.

"I can only hope," said Miss Wilkinson, as Anne was downstairs helping him on with his coat, "that the child will be happy with such a man."

"Sophia," said the old lady, "you are a fool, and I hope God will forgive me for saying so."

CHAPTER II

FOYLE MANOR

"I HOPE the Admiral will be satisfied with your improvement, Hugh," said Mr. Williams. "You haven't got on so well as I should have liked in some things. Mathematics are your weak point, and I expect he will make a lot of Mathematics. Still, we've ground at them pretty steadily. I can't honestly say it's my fault if you haven't progressed as well as you should have done."

"No, it isn't your fault," said the boy. "Mathematics aren't in my line."

"You're well ahead in Classics," pursued the tutor, a little anxiously. "He can't complain there, if he knows anything about it. But sailors don't pay much attention to Classics. I shall say to him: 'My dear Admiral, a fellow must follow his bent. Let him work at his Classics and I'll guarantee that he shall go to the 'Varsity as well equipped as most fellows. That'll be the way to tackle him, eh?"

"I think you must have forgotten what my father is like if you expect to tackle him in that way," said the boy drily.

"Oh, he'll respect me if I stand up to him," said Mr. Williams. "A tutor isn't a servant, you know, Hugh. He's a gentleman, and of course he treats other gentle-

men as his equals. Anyhow, I've taken great pains to turn you into a gentleman. I don't think he'll find much to grumble at there."

"Yes, you have taken a lot of trouble about that," said the boy quietly.

Hugh Lelacheur was a tall thin boy of sixteen, with a solemn face and a pair of fine eyes, which formed perhaps his only claim to good looks. One would not have said that the process towards which his companion had bent his energies had given him much trouble, nor, perhaps, that it was one for which that companion was eminently fitted. Mr. Williams was a big young man. He wore a heavy moustache and the beginnings of a pair of side whiskers. His hands were moist and clumsy, and the stubby finger nails not quite clean. There was a look half bold, half diffident in his eyes; his mouth was amiable, if weak, and his chin, which he had shaved on the previous day, a trifle heavy.

The two of them were sitting on a bench on Southampton platform. They had arrived from St. Malo a few hours before, and were awaiting the train by which the Admiral and Anne were travelling from London, and by which they would go on with them into Dorsetshire. It was a lovely summer afternoon, the first day of June. The tide was out and the green mudflats behind them sent a smell of seaweed into the clear air.

"I can't say I'm sorry to get away from St. Lunaire," pursued the tutor. "One gets tired of a place like that

in three years. If it had been Dinard it would have been better fun. But, of course, you would have been too young for that."

"Too young for what?" asked the boy.

"Oh, for all—for all that goes on at a place like that. Of course it is all right for me—no harm in it, in the least; it does you good to see a little bit of life, but——"

"What do you call seeing life? What used you to do when you went over to Dinard—to shop?"

"I say, Hugh," said Mr. Williams nervously, "you won't say anything to the Admiral about my going over to Dinard occasionally. I know I did tell the old curé that I went there to shop, and so I did—in a way. But, of course, I used to have a little bit of fun too. Still, the Admiral might not understand it quite, if you were to say anything, and——"

"I don't suppose my father will want to talk to me much. He never has—at least, not since I missed my medical for the navy. He'll always have it in his mind that I'm not in the service, as he meant me to be, and he will tell me so."

"It wasn't your fault, old chap."

"I know it wasn't my fault. But that doesn't seem to make much difference. I'm a disappointment, and he doesn't hide it. I am not sure that I care for the idea of being shut up in an out-of-the-way country place like Foyle seems to be. I think I *am* sorry that we left St. Lunaire."

"You won't be shut up alone with him," said the

tutor. "You'll have me, you know, old chap. And then, of course, there'll be—er—Anne."

It was rather impertinent of Mr. Williams to call his pupil's sister by her Christian name, for he had never seen her. But Mr. Williams was a sentimental young man, always on the lookout for a feminine object of languishment, and it gave him a mild thrill to speak of—er—Anne. Hugh did not notice the presumption.

"Oh! Anne," he said. "I don't care much for girls. We'll let her go her way, Mr. Williams, and we'll go ours."

"We must try and make it jolly for her," said the tutor. "You've never seen her, have you, Hugh?"

"Not since I can remember. It seems funny not to know your own sister. Still, I expect girls are much the same all the world over. Hullo, here's the train."

They hurried down the platform. The Admiral stepped out of a second-class carriage as the train came to a standstill. "Well, my boy," he said, shaking hands with his son. "How are you, Mr. Williams? Where's your luggage? Here, you fellow, come and look after this." He went down the platform with the tutor, and left Hugh standing before the open door. Anne was just inside. There was a look of pleasure, almost of yearning, on her face, but shyness held her and she blushed.

"Come in," she said, and then laughed.

Hugh was no less shy as he stepped into the carriage, and he was terribly afraid that Anne would want to kiss him.

She did want to kiss him. She had a wonderfully vivid recollection of herself as a tiny child holding in her arms a pink morsel of humanity that had been Hugh, and her soul had intermittently hungered for her brother ever since. And, strangely enough, the hunger was not driven away by the sight of this tall solemn-faced boy with the great eyes, who seemed so desperately afraid of her. But she did not kiss him. "It's jolly being together again," she said lightly. "We'll have splendid times at Foyle, Hugh. I've made father tell me all about it coming down."

Hugh sat down opposite to her, and stole a glance at her face. Her dark eyes, very much like his own in the way they were set between their long lashes, were bright, and tender too, as she turned them on him. There was a flush on her cheeks. Her lips were parted, and showed a line of white regular teeth. It occurred to Hugh that his sister was pretty.

"It will be such fun exploring," she said. "I'll take you round. I know something about it and you know nothing. Hugh, how tall you are!—nearly as tall as I am."

Hugh had not yet said a word. She left off chattering, and he had to find his tongue.

"I wonder if Mr. Williams has got all the luggage?" he said.

"What is Mr. Williams like?" she asked. "Father says I have got to do lessons with him for a year."

"Lessons!" repeated Hugh. "That was him with me."

"I didn't look at him," she said. "I was looking out for you. Oh, Hugh, I am so glad we are to be together again. I haven't seen you since you were a tiny little baby. Aren't you glad too?"

"Yes," said Hugh, and then, clutching at his manhood's independence, "I expect we shall get on all right. You'll have to work hard if you are to read with Mr. Williams and me. He's pretty strict."

"Is he?" she said indifferently. "Oh, here's father."

The Admiral got into the carriage and shut the door. He had said to Mr. Williams: "I expect you would like to smoke," and left him. Mr. Williams did not want to smoke. He had caught a glimpse of Anne, standing up in the carriage, looking for her brother, her eyes shining. He sat looking out on to the forest through which the train was passing without seeing it. Anne's eyes ran riot through his susceptible brain. He sighed deeply, fingered his chin reflectingly, and wished it had been his morning for shaving.

They came in the afternoon to the little town of Lydmouth, lying snuggled up against the low cliff round its toy harbour, facing the glittering summer sea. There was a serviceable waggonette with a pair of stout cobs awaiting them, and a luggage cart in the charge of a bronzed round-faced man, who touched his cap to the Admiral and grinned widely at Anne and Hugh. He was rather like a younger stumpier edition of their father, with the same grizzled look and the same light blue far-seeing eyes. Hugh shook hands with him,

and said: "How do you do, Dunster? I didn't know you were going to be here."

"No fear o' me deserting the master," he replied.

Hugh explained to Anne, in an aside, that this was their father's old servant, who had sailed with him for many years. "He's a jolly good sort," he said. "I'm glad he'll be here."

The Admiral had been casting side-looks at the sea and sniffing the salt breezes. "Dunster," he said suddenly, "we'll take the boat out."

"Old Jack'll go with you, sir," replied Dunster promptly. "I'll take the young lady and gentleman home and look after the things."

"Very well," said the Admiral. "Send the dogcart for me at half-past six." And he walked off down to the harbour.

Dunster had the luggage into the cart in no time. When he had dismissed the two porters, whom he had induced to get through their job with a celerity that surprised no one more than themselves, he said to the groom on the box of the waggonette: "Now then, John, you take this here cart, and I'll drive the young master and mistress."

John jumped down from his seat with alacrity, and Dunster took his place and the reins. He was not an expert whip, but the cobs behaved as if they were as pleased to act under his direction as the porters and the groom had been. There were a portmanteau and some bags on the box-seat beside him, and Anne and Hugh and the tutor got in behind.

"Hugh," said Mr. Williams, in a stage whisper, "introduce me."

"Oh! this is Mr. Williams, Dunster," said Hugh.

"Pleased to see you, sir," said Dunster, touching his hat, but Mr. Williams said, with a blush and a weak smile. "No, I mean your sister, Hugh."

Anne laughed and shook hands with him, and Dunster relieved the subsequent tension by half turning round in his seat and saying: "It's a six-mile drive, miss, and wonderful pretty country. We shall soon get there with these little fellows."

"What is Foyle like?" asked Anne.

"Well there, you wait till you see it, miss," replied Dunster. "If you don't say it's the snuggest prettiest little property you ever saw, I'm a Yankee. Garden! you never see such a garden, and there's a snug little farm, with livestock and hens and turkeys and ducks to look after, and a bit of a lake among the trees, and an old punt on it what I've made watertight and rigged up all ready for you. And there's a little island on the lake. We'll knock up a kind of log hut there when I get a minute to spare, and you can have picnics. Then there's these little fellows—the Admiral ain't bought a side saddle yet, but he'll do it, never fear. There's downs all round the house, and you and Master Hugh'll have many a scamper."

A sudden smile appeared on Hugh's face. There was no telling what pleasures life could afford with Dunster at the helm. Any one who knew Dunster, anybody under the age of manhood or womanhood, could safely trust

him to afford constant and ever-fresh thrills. He had had experience of that in his childhood. Dunster never seemed to have anything to do but to devise amusement, and yet Dunster did as much work as two other men. He turned towards Anne, who had listened with sparkling eyes to the description of her new home.

"What is the house like?" she asked.

"The house? Well, you wait till you see the house, miss," replied Dunster. "If you don't say—— But there, I done it all myself while the Admiral was in London, so I won't blow my own trumpet. I've took special pains with your room and Master Hugh's, miss. It looks over the stableyard—a bit of life for you. Nobody won't bother you there, and you can do what you like."

Mr. Williams thought it was time to assert himself. "I suppose that is where we shall do our work?" he said.

"Well, sir," replied Dunster, "the Admiral, he thought you'd be more comfortable on your own hook, if I may say so, in the lodge. It's a roomy lodge, wonderful pretty, with a thatch roof and them lattice windows. The gardener and his wife lives there, and Mrs. Ivimey, she cooks like one o'clock, and I'll come in occasional and look after your clothes. I've picked you out two good rooms and had 'em done up a treat —bookcases and everything. The Admiral thought you'd do your studying there with Master Hugh, and him and Miss Anne could have their room in the house to theirselves, so to speak. Not but that they won't be

asking you up to a tea-party now and then. I'll be bound they will."

This arrangement, in which the hand of Dunster himself was at least as apparent as that of the Admiral, would have seemed an eminently satisfactory one to Mr. Williams an hour or two before. He was to have his own quarters, and be his own master outside of the hours devoted to study. Now it came as something of a disappointment to him to learn that he would not, as a matter of course, share the more intimate life of his pupil and his pupil's sister. Still, his thatched and lattice-windowed lodge was in the garden, and he supposed he would not be expected to keep out of the garden, even if he had to await an invitation before entering the house.

They had driven over a billow of the rolling downs and were passing along a road in the valley, where great trees had collected, growing in the rich soil which they could not find on the bare uplands. They went over an old stone bridge and passed through a pretty straggling village, with stone-built cottages and gay patches of garden. A grey church tower dominated it from a little way up the hillside, flanked by its square comfortable-looking parsonage. Anne exclaimed at its beauty.

"Ah! you wait till you see Foyle, miss," said Dunster. "This is Kennet Bridge. It ain't nothing to Foyle. We're more than half way now."

The two brisk little cobs covered the miles of white road at a fast trot, their satin-skinned flanks creasing

and stretching, their hoofs ringing, now separately, now in sharp unison. They trotted down a gentle slope and into the village of Foyle. The river watering the pleasant valley widened here to a pebbly shallow and ran under a three-arched bridge of ancient masonry. The valley, too, was wider, and stretched away from the high down, underneath which nestled the village, in meadow and deep woodland. There was a mill by the bridge, and beyond that a little group of cottages and a forge; on the other side of the road was an old farm-house, with a lichened stone roof, standing behind a wall in which was a gate of wrought iron, giving a glimpse of a paved garden court. The farm buildings ran along by the side of the road, and beyond them was another row of old cottages. The footpaths were raised, and alongside one of them ran a little tributary stream in a stone gutter. The trees of Foyle climbed high into the blue sky. A church spire peeped out from among them, above the village, but their foliage was too thick to allow anything but the spire to be seen. Dunster jerked his whip in the direction of the church. "The Manor lies among them trees," he said, and they turned round by the mill and drove along a shady road by the river.

They passed the church and the rectory lying in its shadow, and a hundred yards farther up the road appeared the thatched, rose-and-honeysuckle-covered lodge in which Mr. Williams was to make his home. It guarded a low white gateway, through which Dunster turned his horses, not without some danger to the

paint of the gatepost. Here Mr. Williams and his effects were dropped, to be received by a buxom woman in a print dress, who smiled copiously at each of the party in turn. Then they drove on for a few yards under the trees and round a corner to where a green cedared lawn was spread in the dappled sunlight, rising and dipping in gentle undulations, down on one side to the little tree-bordered lake, and up to a low, white, broad-eaved house, whose windows were shining in the westering sun. Anne and Hugh got down and entered the house by a low porch, and Dunster drove round to the stableyard with a promise to return shortly.

They found themselves in a spacious hall, with a beamed roof and an open fireplace. Dunster's work had been done so well that there was no appearance of newness. The furniture was old, and looked as if it had been there since time immemorial. Some of it had, for the Admiral had bought the house with its contents. But Dunster had rearranged it all, and added his master's own furniture and pictures and trophies, and the house had become settled and habitable at once. There was a not unpleasant smell of new paint, and soap, and upholstery, all mixed together. Anne clasped her hands and turned to her brother.

"Oh! Hugh, it will be delightful living here," she said. "Isn't it a dear old place? And what fun Dunster is! He'll do all sorts of things to help us to enjoy ourselves."

Dunster joined them at this point. He could not deny himself the pleasure of showing them everything.

The dining-room was panelled, with a broad oak seat under the window, and another open fireplace. There was a modernized drawing-room, with French windows opening on to the lawn. It had that quiet faded air with which such country drawing-rooms, little used, make their appeal of restfulness, and Dunster had kept that air intact. They went down two shallow oak steps to the Admiral's room, one of the oldest in the house, panelled in dark oak, with a long lattice window opening on to a little retired rose garden surrounded by a yew hedge. It looked as if its owner had used it for the best part of his lifetime.

"I've asked them to get you a cup of tea in your own room upstairs, miss," said Dunster, when they had duly admired this example of his handiwork, and they went up the broad oak staircase, down three steps, and along another passage, and into a big light room full of rather shabby furniture, but looking so comfortable and homelike that no room could have pleased them better. Tea was laid for them on the table in the middle of the room. "I'll just go and see after the luggage," said Dunster, "and then I'll show you round outside, miss—that's to say unless you and Master Hugh would rather go round by your two selves."

He held his head on one side inquiringly. Anne said: "Oh no, we'll go with you. But I must take off my jacket and hat and wash before tea. Where are our bedrooms?"

Dunster showed them. There was a vase of flowers on Anne's dressing-table and the window curtains and

bed furniture were fresh and dainty. The wallpaper was new, and had a little pattern of rosebuds.

"What a sweet room!" said Anne. "Who has made it all so pretty?"

Dunster's broad face beamed. "I did, miss," he said. "Bless you, I know what young ladies like. Ah, here's Martha. This is the young person I've got to look after you, miss. Now, my girl, you bustle along and get some hot water. You ought to have had it all ready for your young lady. But there, you'll learn to think of these things in time. You're willing, and where the heart's willing the feet and hands is quick."

The apple-cheeked country girl went scurrying down the passage, and Dunster shut the door and conducted Hugh, who had been standing up against the doorpost, to his room next door. "Another can of hot water, please," he called down the passage. "I'll unpack your things and get you to rights while you're having your tea, Master Hugh," he said. "We'll soon get shipshape. Now, don't you think it's a nice place, sir? Don't you think you can live happy here?"

"I think it's the jolliest place I've ever seen," said Hugh. "I'd no idea it would be half so jolly."

"That's right, sir—that's right. And we'll all live happy here for many a long day, I hope. I found it, you know. Bless you, I know what the Admiral wants after all these years better than he knows it himself."

"Does father like the place?"

"It's just what he wants, quite away from the sea, but not too far away. I got him a boat, and he can always go over and have a sail if he wants to. He likes his garden, and we'll keep him busy altering a bit here and a bit there every year. And there'll be a bit of stock to fatten, and there's a bit of shooting—enough to give him something to do in the winter. And there's books, and I've ordered him the papers he likes, and we'll get some of his old shipmates down for him occasionally. And if he likes to go up to London every now and then to his club, and to see a bit of life, why, we'll make it easy for him. Oh yes, it's just the place he wants, with me to look after him, and put him in the way of enjoying of it."

Dunster was busy unpacking Hugh's trunks and putting his clothes away all the while he was talking. He was the good-humoured bustling genius of the place, prepared to make everybody comfortable and happy, and gain his own pleasure in doing so. "I'm glad you've come here, Dunster," said Hugh. "I think we shall have an awfully good time."

He and Anne lingered over their tea, with the new-laid eggs, thick cream, and home-made bread of the country. Everything about the room and about the house was sweet and fresh, and the balmy air of the June evening stole through the open casement and told of outdoor delights yet to be explored.

Anne sat at the head of the table, and poured out the tea. "Do you like sugar, Hugh?" she asked. "And how many lumps?" Then she laughed. "Fancy not

knowing whether one's own brother likes sugar or not!" she said.

Hugh, with his mouth stuffed, laughed too. They looked at each other and laughed together, out of pure happiness.

"Do you know," said Anne, "that Dunster looks after everything in the house? The maids are just country girls. Martha is the oldest of them, and she is only twenty."

"Isn't the cook more than twenty?" asked Hugh. "Father won't like that much."

"Dunster chose her because he said she had the hand for it, and what she doesn't know he is teaching her. He teaches them all their work, and he is so cheerful and friendly that they will do anything for him."

Dunster knocked at the door at that moment.

"Now, miss, if you're ready," he said. "I've got half-an-hour at your service."

They went out into the garden. It was full of surprises. There was the soft lawn, shaded by the dark horizontal limbs of the age-old cedars, ringed with blossoming lilacs. The lake was overhung with great beeches, and on a spur of jutting grass was a little group of silver birch. On the other bank was an oak copse, carpeted with wild hyacinths, and the margin was fringed with yellow flags. There was a yew-enclosed rose garden, with flagged paths and a sundial. There was another little shut-off garden, which had been left to grow wild, where the formal beds were full of self-

sown foxgloves, not yet in flower. The south side of the house was trellised, and covered with magnolia, myrtle, and banksia roses. The shrubbery walk, opening at one place into a garden of primroses, led to the walled kitchen garden, in which flowers and fruit and vegetables were all growing together. Wallflowers and snapdragons bloomed on the top of the old red-brick wall, and fruit-trees were ripening against it. Dunster was very proud of the fruit garden, and told them how everything ought to be done in it. He was also greatly interested in the ducks and poultry of the little farm, and beamed with anticipatory pleasure as Anne showed by her questions and comments that she would like to take part in the activities he had already set on foot there.

Mr. Williams joined them, with his hands in his pockets and an air of slight deprecation, and his gratification was marked when they accompanied him to the lodge and inspected his quarters. His manner towards Anne was respectful, marred only by a tincture of tenderness, which Dunster's sharp eyes may have detected, for he cut short the visit to the lodge, and was contemplative as he convoyed his charges back to the house.

Anne and Hugh dined with their father, and Dunster, in black clothes with a white shirt-front, waited on them. The windows were open to the mild evening air, and a sense of peace and restfulness lay over the old house, as the dusk crept on. Hugh was silent, digesting his experiences, but Anne chattered gaily,

and her father, in quiet good humour, responded to her mood. "Yes, the place suits me very well," he said; "and if you think it will suit you too, young lady—well, then, we're all pleased together." The evening passed without his once reminding Hugh that if things had turned out differently he would now be well on the road to advancement in the only profession worth entering. He smoked a cigar on a garden seat in the rose garden after dinner, and did not dismiss the girl and boy until half-past nine.

Anne and Hugh went upstairs together, and passed by an open window in the upper corridor. The long day had nearly worn itself out, but they could see the lawn and the lake lying before them in the twilight.

"Hugh," said Anne, "we are going to be as happy as the day is long. Let us get up early tomorrow, so as not to miss any of it."

"Very well," said Hugh.

She looked at him. "Aren't you pleased with it all?" she asked.

"Yes, I am," he replied slowly. "Yes, I am; very pleased."

"Well, good-night," she said, and kissed him. It was the sisterly kiss that Hugh had so dreaded upon first meeting her, but he received it unflinchingly.

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN

One dewy morning, after they had been at Foyle for a week or so, Anne woke very early and looked out of the window. White dew was on the lawns and no smoke arose from the chimneys of the lodge, which peeped from among the trees and bushes. Dawn had stolen up, and the full light of the long summer day had taken the sleeping world unawares. The air was sweet and virginal, and full of the song of birds fluting among the lilacs. Here was a new delight, this fresh unspoilt world which the sun was just beginning to warm. It was impossible to go back to bed again and sleep away those glorious hours of early morning. Anne dressed and called Hugh. Together they stole through the silent house and out into the clamorous life of the garden. Mr. Williams was in favour at that moment —his popularity rose and fell—so they threw pebbles in at his open window, and, when a tangled apologetic head appeared under the eaves, announced that the day's activities were about to begin, and invited him to share them.

After that happy morning Anne promulgated a decree: bedtime would be immediately after dinner when the Admiral was at home, and earlier still if he were away, and the day would begin not later than five

o'clock in the morning, as long as the summer lasted. So they tasted the fulness of the pleasures of the open air, and of all that glorious summer wasted scarcely an hour of daylight.

Their life was spent almost entirely in the open air. Dunster, who seemed to get his own way in everything, although to all appearance acting under the sternest discipline, produced the promised side saddle for Anne, and she and Hugh made long expeditions over the breezy downs, and along the winding valley roads. They busied themselves in the farmyard, and in the plots which Dunster had assigned them in a sunny corner of the kitchen garden. With his help, and with financial aid from the Admiral—who was willing that they should enjoy themselves in their own way, so long as they refrained from disturbing the quietude of his existence—they built a log hut on the island in the lake, and played childish games there. Their games and their talk were often childish, for they were so much alone together that youth lingered, although their bodies grew. Hugh's silence and reserve vanished, and his laugh was heard about the old house, and in the secret places of the garden, as often as Anne's.

The rector of Foyle was an old man, with gentle, courteous manners. Anne was allowed to disturb him whenever she felt disposed. He would show her books in his study, lined with shelves and opening by a French window into the garden; and read her things that he had written—sometimes about Roman remains, sometimes about fly-fishing. They would go into the

mouldy gloom of the church, and dress the altar; for Mrs. Bouverie, the rector's wife, was an invalid, and sat in her sunny faded drawing-room, thinking of the time when the decking of the church and the altar had been her care. The Admiral went seldom to the Rectory —there were doubts about old Mr. Bouverie's Protestantism—but Anne and Hugh ran in and out of the house as if it were a second home.

They were to be found, too, in farmhouse parlours or, better still, in the great flagged kitchens, with their air of cleanliness and comfort, drinking tea with the farmers' wives, who made much of them; and in whatever thatched cottage a baby cooed and crowed there was Anne, worshipping it. They had no lack of friends, although of young people of their own class they saw none. The rector and his wife were the only gentlepeople within a radius of four or five miles, and county neighbours, even beyond that distance, were scarce. Sometimes an old messmate of their father's would come down to stay for a day or two. Some of these were jocular and some were grumpy. The Admiral took them out in his boat once or twice, but Hugh was not a good sailor, and Anne fidgeted, and after a time he always went sailing alone, or with Dunster.

Hugh was clever with his brush and pencil. Anne thought the scenes which he dabbled on to paper with water-colours were wonderful. His efforts served to fix in his brain the beauty of the world around him, and he enjoyed himself intensely, seated on the banks of a stream, or with his back to a tree.

By-and-by he told Anne that he wanted to be an artist. Anne was delighted with the idea. Mr. Williams was less encouraging. "It is not the life for a gentleman," he said. "*I* sha'n't have anything to do with suggesting it to the Admiral, Hugh."

Anne was not present, or he would not have spoken in this way. Anne would have told him what he must do and he would have done it. Dunster, next appealed to, was for letting everybody do what pleased him or her best, so long as there was nothing that *had* to be done which interfered with individual preferences; but in this case he doubted his powers to assist an arrangement.

"You see, Master Hugh," he said, "I can do a good deal with the Admiral, so long as he don't tumble to it that I'm giving him advice about what don't concern me, or giving him advice about anything, which he won't put up with. But if I was to speak to him about a thing like that I should be sent off with a flea in my ear pretty quick, to attend to my pantry. The Admiral can look wonderful old-fashioned at a man if he wants to. You'd better speak to him yourself, or get Miss Anne to."

It needed courage for Hugh to address his father on a question of this sort, which would be sure to bring down on his head implied reproaches for his failure to get into the navy. But he did not leave it to Anne; he made the suggestion, and it was received in the way he had feared. The Admiral would not hear of such a thing. Fiddling about with paper and paint like a schoolgirl! What sort of an occupation in life was

that for any one who called himself a man? "Just look what you would have been doing by this time in the service, if——" and so on. "Your business now is to do your work and get ready for some profession in which you can use your brains a bit. Fiddle with your paints and paper by all means, in your spare time—no objection to that—but don't come to me again with such an idea for spending your life." Hugh retired, dejected, but went on fiddling with his paints and paper as before.

Dunster, gauging the state of Mr. Williams's mind with regard to Anne at an early date, took steps to have his position defined for him. He suggested to the Admiral, with ingenuous innocence, that it would be a nuisance for him to be always meeting Mr. Williams about the house and garden—for Mr. Williams had not taken Dunster's own hint to confine himself to his own apartments unless by special invitation, but was always insinuating himself into his pupils' company in their free hours.

"That's quite true, Dunster," said the Admiral. "Why the deuce can't the fellow keep to his own quarters? Always meeting him about the place, with his stupid hands in his pockets. But what can I do? I'm all for discipline, but I can't very well turn him off the place when I've got him here."

"You leave that to me, sir," said Dunster. "I can put it to him in a delicate way. He's a nice gentleman, and him and me's very good friends, begging your pardon, sir."

"Well, if you can find a way—I'll have him up to dine now and then. It would be a nuisance to have him go, and have to get another one. I've no objection to him, but I don't want to be always having him grinning at me round every corner."

"If I might presoom to make a suggestion, sir," said Dunster, "I should say, let Master Hugh go down at his regular hours to the lodge, but knock off the time he comes up here to Miss Anne."

"What do you mean? I'm not going to have Miss Anne going down to his rooms. She's only a child, but if he teaches her at all he's got to come up to her."

"Yes, sir. Well, I suppose he's got to be about the house an hour or two every day."

"H'm! It's a nuisance. Met him going upstairs yesterday as if the place belonged to him, and there's his cap on the hall table. Where is he now?"

"He's upstairs, sir, talking. Lessons is over."

"I won't have him living here. I'm sure I don't know what he teaches Miss Anne."

"Mathematics, sir, and such like, the young lady did tell me."

"What's the good of that to a woman? If she can add up her bills that's all the mathematics she wants."

"I did think myself, sir, if you will allow me to mention it, that if Miss Anne was to read by herself, something stiff-like, every day, it would be easier to keep Mr. Williams out of the house."

"H'm! She's old enough to be able to do that.

Well, I think we'll have it so, Dunster; and give him a hint, if you can, to keep to himself a bit more."

"Yes, sir; I suppose you'll tell him yourself about Miss Anne."

"Ask him to come to me now and I'll get it over."

Dunster delivered the summons. Mr. Williams was seated at the table in the schoolroom, gumming stamps into Anne's album. Anne liked stamps, but had an aversion to gum. He looked up with some apprehension as the message was delivered. "What does he want?" he whispered to Dunster as he followed him downstairs.

"It's about Miss Anne, sir, I think," said Dunster, and Mr. Williams went in to his patron quaking.

The Admiral told him of his decision shortly, and not in such a manner as to allay his fears. He was out of the room in less than two minutes, wondering whether he was to take the curt announcement that had been made to him as a warning.

Dunster happened to be walking down the drive as he went out of the hall door, and allowed himself to be caught up. "I was just wanting to have a word with you, sir," he said. "You know I mean well towards you, and you won't take amiss what I'm agoing to say?"

To what was this a prelude? Mr. Williams's depression increased. "No, of course not," he said. "What is it?"

"Well, sir, you know the Admiral isn't one to say much unless he's driven to it, and then he flies out. Personally, I've always took warning before the flying

out, when possible, and you won't take it amiss if I recommend you to do the same."

"What about?" queried Mr. Williams, in a weak voice.

"Well, sir, I expect you know as well as I do. Now if I was you I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd keep strictly to them cosy little quarters of yours, as before advised, and not be seen about this here garden, nor in the house, unless specially invited. That's my advice to you, and if kept, why we shall have you living happily here for another three or four years, 'stead of—well, I won't say what instead of. You don't take my words amiss, sir, I hope?"

Mr. Williams did not take them amiss. He discussed the situation with himself during a lonely walk. The perspiration stood on his brow at the thought of what the Admiral *might* have said, and what he probably would say if he were called upon to speak again. Mr. Williams decided that he had been a fool. It was all his confounded impressionable heart. He would be jolly careful for the future. But lor'! what a fool he must have been for both the Admiral and Dunster to have remarked his sheep's eyes! Why, the Admiral had scarcely ever seen him and Anne together.

So Dunster's manœuvring had its desired effect. Mr. Williams curbed his impressionable heart when in Anne's presence, and found that life was more enjoyable than before. After a time he regained the privilege of her society, for when Dunster was satisfied that his warning had been efficacious he put no further restraint on the

intercourse that was only natural under the circumstances, and, as the Admiral was away from Foyle not seldom, Mr. Williams enjoyed periods of immunity from the restraint caused by his presence, and was much with his former and present pupils.

The Admiral had not enjoyed his purchase for long before he began to grow tired of his isolation. His books, his garden, his little farm, and his boat, as a background of interest, were well enough, but he missed the human companionship of which the previous years had been so full. He secured visitors at Foyle not without some difficulty, for it was far from the busy centres of life, and there was not much amusement to offer, especially in the summer. He had never been the man to make close individual friendships, and he missed the stir and interest of a life where there had been continual coming and going, and a constant interchange of news and ideas, a life in which numerous acquaintances had pleasantly distracted him, and demanded in return only such small change of sociability as it had pleased him to pay, without calling upon him to honour drafts against his time or inclination. He found his old friends, thrown upon his hands to entertain all day long in a solitude of two—for he seldom managed to secure more than one at a time—apt to bore instead of enlivening him, and after he had been up to town once or twice, and enjoyed the sort of society he preferred—at his club and elsewhere—he furnished himself a set of chambers, and thenceforward spent half his time there. It did not occur to him that he was neglecting his children,

and the arrangement suited them admirably; for though he did not intentionally interfere with their pursuits when he was at home, there were rules to be kept and prejudices to be avoided. As for them, they never left Foyle. Anne was to have visited her grandmother in August, but old Lady Wilkinson was taken ill about that time, and only lived for a few months longer, and the Admiral would not allow her to visit her aunt. His permitting a girl of Anne's age to be entirely without the companionship of some woman who could exercise authority and guidance over her was not punished as it might have been, for she grew up, in her beautiful surroundings, as sweet and fair as a girl could be, and even he, in his cross-grained way, liked to have her near him. Nevertheless, he was dictatorial to her, and never showed that her society gave him any pleasure.

With the companionship of his son he was frankly bored, and showed it, and Hugh retired into his shell of reserve when in his father's company, and was silent and even glum. But that company was vouchsafed to him so seldom that it made no appreciable mark on the delights of that royal summer. He did his work with Mr. Williams, and for the rest of the day there was Anne; and Anne was everything to him—Anne and the beauty of the garden and the woods and fields, the meadow streams and the chalky flower-bordered lanes, the dewy downs, the hot summer noons, the mellow afternoons, the dusk and the scented moonlit nights: all the sweet influences about him that sank into and expanded his soul were mixed up with his love for Anne.

Anne was taken up with her country pursuits, and wanted no place but Foyle, and no companionship but what she had. During the summer she was never indoors when she could possibly be in the open air. Her reading of "something stiff-like" by herself—which duty had been imposed upon her by her father without his mentioning that it had been Dunster's suggestion—was pursued under a tree in the orchard, in a hammock that Dunster had netted for her, in the revivified punt, or in the log hut. She read religiously for an hour a day—anything that looked stiff enough for the purpose—and forgot what she had been reading the moment the hour was up.

The long summer faded into autumn, and autumn into winter. The Admiral was more at home, busy with his few hundred acres of stubble and covert, but he was still away for days together, and Anne and Hugh spent long evenings in their upstairs sanctuary, never at a loss for occupation. Hugh would draw and Anne would sew; both of them made elaborate and useless articles with fret-saws; both of them collected foreign stamps. They classified their collections—butterflies, plants, fossils from the chalk pits. They played bezique and chess and draughts, and other games, together; or they would spend long evenings reading. Anne would lie buried in the great shabby easy-chair by the fire, Hugh would sit under the lamp over the table, and hours of silence would pass, broken only by the noise of the fire, the turning of leaves, a cough, or a little spurt of talk. Anne was very particular about bedtime and

about early rising, and Hugh followed her in her self-imposed rules as well as in her proposals for enjoyment. Her sane well-balanced nature supplied of itself the discipline of which her youth might have felt the lack, and, although she and Hugh both felt a sense of freedom when their father went away and left the house to them, there was nothing in their manner of life that he could possibly have objected to when they were relieved of his presence.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE BLOMFIELD

THERE was an old print hanging in the schoolroom at Foyle of the front of a noble Elizabethan mansion, with the inscription "Wyse Hall, Suffolk. The Seat of Sir Richard Lelacheur, Bart." Dunster had hung the pictures, as he had arranged the furniture in the different rooms, or possibly the Admiral might not have wished to have this reminder of the home of his birth hanging where it could constantly be seen by his son and daughter. He had never spoken to them of his elder brother, or of his own boyhood, or of the home of his ancestors. Hugh had never even heard of the family from which he had sprung—a family that had wealth and was before the eye of the great world. Anne told him what she knew one winter evening when they were sitting before the fire roasting chestnuts.

"Aunt Sophia told me," she said. "I think she had heard about it from mother. It was a great many years ago, when father was a young man. He had gone down to shoot at Wyse Hall, and he had been put into one of the bachelor rooms instead of the room he had always had as a boy. He was furious about it, and left the house the next morning; and he has never spoken to Uncle Simeon since."

"It seems rather odd to make such a fuss about a rotten thing like that," said Hugh.

"Aunt Sophia said it was a splendid great house," said Anne, "and there were crowds of bedrooms in it, and he thought they ought to have kept his own room just as it had been in his father's time, especially as his father was only just dead and his brother had come into a great deal of money, while he had not got so much as he expected."

"All the same," said Hugh, "it was a stupid thing to quarrel so seriously about. And I don't suppose his brother had anything to do with it, either. In a house like that the master would not say what bedrooms the people were to have."

"I believe Uncle Simeon was sorry about it," said Anne; "at any rate he tried afterwards to make it up with father. But he wouldn't, and they have never spoken to one another since."

"It's rough luck on us. It would have been jolly to go to a house like that, and we haven't got any other relations except Granny and Aunt Sophia. If he once gets a thing into his head he can't get it out. It was just the same with me and the Navy. It wasn't my fault, but I shall never hear the last of it."

"There is no doubt," said Anne reflectively, "that father is obstinate. And he takes strong likes and dislikes. He can't bear poor Aunt Sophia—and she is a good old thing, really. But he's all right to us, isn't he, Hugh?"

Hugh considered. "I suppose he is—in a way,"

he said. "It happens to suit us, the way in which he leaves us alone. But of course he doesn't look after us in the least, or care what becomes of us. I don't know what will happen when we get a bit older."

"Well, you are going to Cambridge. That is settled."

"Yes; but what will happen after that? If I go into the Church, which he has dropped hints about—and I'm sure I don't particularly want to—I can't live here; and what will you do? What will you do when I'm at Cambridge? It will be precious dull for you here, and you don't know any one to go to."

Anne gazed into the fire. "I don't think we need bother about that yet," she said, after a pause. "You won't be going to Cambridge for nearly three years, and we shall be together here until then. I don't want anything better. I love this place, and everybody in it. I don't want to go away from it, ever. You know, Hugh, it is all very well to talk about father, and perhaps it is true that he doesn't look after us much, but we don't want it, do we? We are much happier than other people of our age. I'm sure of that, because I remember at St. Leonards nobody of our age was so free as we are. I love waking up in the morning and thinking of another day to come. Whatever happens to us in the future we shall always have this to look back on. And you love it all quite as much as I do, don't you?"

"Well," said Hugh, reflecting in his turn, "of course

it isn't in my nature to enjoy things quite in the same way as you do."

Anne laughed at him. "I never think about myself like that," she said. "I just take everything as it comes. But I enjoy myself here so much that I've got to talk about it sometimes, you know, Hugh, so that you can take hold of it all."

"Yes, I know," said the wise Hugh, "it isn't enough only to be happy. You've got to know that you are happy."

Probably few boys or girls of sixteen or thereabouts are so consciously happy that they do not look forward to a future of still more blissful happiness; but Foyle and the country around it, and their active untrammelled life, had cast such a spell on these two that they wished for nothing better, and the limit of their ambition for the future was to live at Foyle together for the rest of their lives, much as they were living now. Such a life could not be expected to last without changes, nor perhaps such an ambition, but it did last without diminution of their enjoyment of it for two happy untroubled years.

At the end of that time Anne was nineteen, a woman grown, straight and tall, abounding in health and activity. Hugh was tall too, and his features were beginning to wear the stamp of manhood. He had little share of Anne's beauty, except in his big dark eyes, but his face was refined, and would not be without distinction. Nothing but the steady growth of brother and sister had changed at Foyle during those

two years. Neither Anne nor Hugh had slept for a night out of the house, and the only visitor they had had, except the Admiral's friends, was their aunt, who had come to stay for a fortnight in the spring after old Lady Wilkinson's death. The Admiral had granted that much, perhaps not wishing to quarrel with her finally on account of her wealth, which was now considerable, and might be expected in the course of nature to come to his children, who were her only living relations. He was her trustee, and remained at Foyle for two days of her visit, to talk business, and then betook himself to London, and did not return until after her departure.

Miss Wilkinson could not but be struck with the way her niece was growing up, although she confided to old Mrs. Bouverie her horror at the idea of a young girl being left to herself in a household of men, with no older woman to advise or direct her.

"My dear," said the old lady, "Anne has a very sweet and true character. I have watched her, and if I had seen that all was not well I should have spoken, much as I should have disliked doing so. At present there is no need to say anything. You will not say, I think, that there is any need."

Miss Wilkinson could not say that there was, and was comforted for Anne's sake. But she could not but feel it hard that neither Anne nor Hugh should be allowed to visit her in her big but rather lonely house on the Marina, for the Admiral, for some crabbed reason of his own, would never give his permission. He

himself was more in London than ever after the first winter at Foyle, but life went on placidly and equably without him. Where all would have been monotonous sameness to one out of sympathy with Nature, Anne and Hugh found a thousand varieties. There was the ever-changing procession of the seasons to delight and excite them, from the time of the first snowdrop, through the bursting clamorous life of spring up to the glories of high summer, the fall of the year, the call of the warm hearth, and the culmination of Christmas time. Dunster watched over them like a father, and was a mine of resource in all their pleasures. Sometimes the sea would summon him, and he would leave them for a day or two apologetically, coming back braced for his duties with wonderful tales of days and nights on the deep waters. Mr. Williams had the distraction of regular holidays, which he spent in the Yorkshire manufacturing town of his birth. Otherwise he led a vegetable existence. He was comfortable in his cottage rooms, his duties provided him with some interest, and his admiration for Anne, if no longer of a dangerously inflammable order, added salt to his life. At the end of two years, when events began to move quickly, he was thinking of growing a beard, but otherwise the march of time had left no mark on him.

One day, early in the third June, a letter came from the Admiral, from London, announcing his arrival by his usual train on the following Friday, and that of a guest, for whom a room was to be made ready. The announcement caused little excitement to Anne and

Hugh. Some of their father's infrequent guests had taken a certain amount of notice of them, others had taken none, but not one of them had added to the delights that life at Foyle presented when they were left to themselves. It was not probable that this Mr. Blomfield, whose name was new to them, would prove more companionable than others of their father's friends.

They were on the lawn with Mr. Williams as the waggonette drove up to the house on Friday evening. Seated beside their father was a big young man, with a bronzed face, fair hair, and a pair of blue eyes which took in the little group under the cedar with considerable interest—contrary to the custom of the Admiral's friends, who usually took no notice of them until they were forced on their attention, when they grunted, amiably or gruffly, as their several natures impelled them. This visit was evidently going to be one of an unprecedented character, for the first thing the Admiral did on alighting from the carriage was to beckon Anne and Hugh, and introduce them to his guest, with an intimation to them to look after his welfare and show him the place.

The young man's eyes were on Anne the whole time. Anne was undisturbed, but friendly. "We shall have time to go round before dinner if you would like to," she said.

Mr. George Blomfield desired nothing better. The Admiral grunted acquiescence, and retired indoors, and the inspection of garden and farmyard went forward.

Mr. Williams, hanging in the background, was brought forward and introduced and joined the personally conducted tour. He took an unaccountable dislike to this big well-favoured young man. What did he mean by being so bluff and self-satisfied, and what did he mean by those sidelong glances at the face of his companion, who was frankly initiating him into secrets which he, Mr. Williams, had never been invited to penetrate? He was rather a sulky tutor as he dragged at the heels of the exploring party, with his hands in his pockets and his big moustache drooping over his big loose mouth, a contrast in every way to the tall alert figure of the newcomer, with his keen sunburnt face.

The reason of that peculiar shade of tan, as well as the presence of a man of under thirty as a guest of Admiral Lelacheur, was soon revealed. George Blomfield was the son of a New South Wales squatter, who had treated the Admiral with the openhanded hospitality of his kind during the period of his Australian command. He was now home on a holiday, and had looked up his father's frequent guest at his club, according to instructions. The Admiral had invited him to Foyle for the week-end, probably because he felt himself bound to offer him some hospitality, and happened to be leaving London himself. The young man had accepted the invitation more because he did not know how to refuse than because he wanted to go, for he had only just arrived in England, and the pleasures of the metropolis were still awaiting his participation. How he shuddered when he thought of what he might have

missed if he had summoned up courage to say that he was not ready to bury himself in the depths of the country, even for two days; but he did not tell Anne this until a little later.

This great brawny handsome man had the heart of a child. He proved so knowledgeable in the farmyard, which they visited first, that Anne's quick understanding, and Hugh's slower one, warmed towards him, and talk waxed furious. Mr. Williams retired in a huff, to shave and otherwise prepare himself for the Admiral's dinner-table, to which he had been invited, an hour later. He thought the fellow insufferably conceited, swaggering with his rough colonial knowledge, which was of no interest to gentlemen. His departure was a relief. Drawn on by the exhibition of fellow-feeling, Anne disclosed more of her and her brother's intimate pursuits than had ever been confided to a stranger, and he entered into it all with the keenest enjoyment.

"It's glorious," he said, as they strolled back to the house in the peace of the long summer evening. "I was in England for years—at Harrow and at Cambridge—but I didn't remember how lovely the English country was in the summer. I was either longing for the winter, when there was sport to be had, or else wishing myself back in the Bush. I think this place is just heavenly. Thank goodness I'm going to have two whole days of it! We'll have a rare time together."

Anne and Hugh both responded warmly. There was no shyness left between them and this new delightful

companion, the first who had ever shared their dearest pleasures with them.

At dinner the talk was of the Australian Bush, and Anne and Hugh listened with delight and ever-increasing respect to their new friend's tales of his free and open life. The Admiral was more agreeably conversational than was his wont, and Dunster's face, as he moved round the table, was a study of appreciative complaisance. Only Mr. Williams sat silent and glum, eating his portion of food, drinking rather more than his portion of wine, and in the intervals fingering his chin, now adorned by a small tuft of cotton-wool.

After dinner the Admiral retired to his room, and the rest of the small party went out into the scented dusk of the garden. It was owing to Mr. Williams that George Blomfield and Anne strolled to and fro on the lawn while he and Hugh talked together. He was not going to be dragged in the train of this upstart.

"I don't know what you think about that fellow," he said to Hugh, "but I think you'll find you've made a mistake if you let him get too familiar. No Colonial that I've ever met knows how to behave himself like a gentleman, and this one is no exception. Of course they are never educated properly to begin with."

"I don't know what you mean by being educated properly," said Hugh, in surprise. "Blomfield was at Harrow and at Trinity, Cambridge."

"Oh, was he?" said Mr. Williams, somewhat taken aback. He had the greatest respect for both those institutions. "Well, I shouldn't have thought it."

"What's wrong with him?" pursued Hugh. "I think he's a splendid fellow. And Anne thinks so too."

This was gall to Mr. Williams. "I hope Miss Anne won't have reason to change her mind," he said. "I hate all that colonial swagger myself, but then, perhaps, I'm more particular than other people."

"Perhaps you are," said Hugh, and the conversation languished.

The conversation between Anne and George Blomfield, as they walked to and fro across the springy turf, would have seemed the most natural in the world to Hugh, but if old Mrs. Bouverie had happened to overhear it her watchful ears might have detected a new note, unfamiliar to her from the child she loved so well. Anne was simply pouring out in a flood the tale of all the delights she found in the life around her, but she was telling her tale as if she had always longed for a listening ear into which she might pour it, and as if she had found that ear for the first time. And no woman, unless perhaps the one to whom it was addressed, could have failed to catch the keen responsive note of delight with which her confidences were answered. When night had settled down over the lawns and trees, and the three of them went indoors, George Blomfield blinked at the not over-brilliant lamplight in the hall as if his eyes were dazzled.

Hugh received a shock of surprise when he awoke the next morning to find Dunster in his room, and learnt that it was eight o'clock. He never woke early of his own accord, but Anne had always hitherto aroused

him at the hour at which they had decided to begin their day. It was unlike her to have overslept herself, especially on such a glorious summer morning as wafted its perfumed breath into his room. He received a second shock when he looked out of the window and saw Anne and Mr. George Blomfield, engaged in eager conversation, sitting opposite to one another in the old punt, which was drifting in the middle of the lake. He felt a pang of jealousy. George Blomfield was certainly an agreeable companion, and his advent was a boon both to himself and Anne. But she ought not to have cut her brother off from his share in the companionship, which he enjoyed as much as she did, nor ought she to have shown so patently, by omitting to call him, that she wanted it all to herself.

His insight did not pierce further than the obvious fact that Anne liked to talk to their new friend and to listen to him talking. So did he. The possibility of any one falling instantly in love with Anne did not present itself to his mind, still less the possibility of Anne falling in love with anybody. Nor, apparently, did that possibility present itself to Anne's father, for he went his own way, and left his guest to be entertained by his son and daughter. It is not to be supposed that he knew what had come about so suddenly, and was content to await developments, for he regarded Anne as a child, and no more than Hugh thought her capable of arousing passion in the soul of a man. He left his guest to the society of his children, because he had a good many things to do, and did not want to

be bothered with him except at mealtimes, when he was pleased to hear him talk.

On Sunday evening the Admiral asked his guest why he was in such a hurry to get back to London. Mr. Blomfield replied instantly that he was in no sort of a hurry, and it was quickly settled that he should stay for a week. The next four days he spent almost entirely in Anne's society.

Hugh's eyes were opened to what was going on by Mr. Williams, who told him that the fellow was making love to Miss Anne, and he had better not let them out of his sight. Hugh refused to believe it at first, but when he found that his proffered company was politely but persistently evaded—not only by George Blomfield but also by his sister—he began to think that there was something in it, and, thrown back on the society of his tutor, shared something of that gentleman's indignation. All doubt on the subject was swept away from his mind when George sought him out of his own accord one evening, at a time when Anne was not available, and told him point blank that his sister was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and that his future life would be useless to him without her.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" said Hugh.

George admitted that it was rather sudden from one point of view—that of Anne's brother, who could not be expected to see what a pearl among girls she was.

"I don't know about that," said Hugh. "I like her better than anybody in the world, but then I know her, and you don't."

George would not admit that. He did know her, and it was because he did know her that he could not live without her.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Hugh. "You're going away on Friday, and you can't take her with you."

"I don't know that I am going away on Friday," replied George. "If I do, I shall come back again."

Hugh digested this information. "I hope you will," he said. "If Anne has got to marry somebody—and I suppose she must some day or other—I'd just as soon she married you as anybody. Shall I say anything to her?"

"For goodness sake, don't," said George, in deep alarm. "I can say what I want myself when the time comes."

The time came after dinner on Wednesday evening, when George and Anne walked together again in the gloaming, choosing the dark shrubbery walks, and not the moonlit lawn. Hugh was left disconsolate, and went up to the schoolroom to read. The Admiral was in his study.

Hugh sat at the table, as was his wont, his book before him and his head resting on his hands. He had meant to read, but he could only think. Was it possible that this strange new thing was coming to Anne, that he and his affection for her were quite wiped out by it, and as if they had never been?—so little necessary, he told himself, that for the past two days she had exercised her ingenuity in avoiding him. It was

rather hard on him, he thought. She might have known that, if she had really arrived at that state of mind in which she wanted George Blomfield as much as he had asserted that he wanted her, no word of reproach would have come from her brother. She might have told him what was in her mind and been sure of his sympathy. It was incredible to him that she should have come to that state of mind in so short a time; but he could hardly doubt the fact. She had not spoken—she had avoided his company so that she might not be obliged to speak—but her face had been transfigured; she had been a different creature, happier, more beautiful, even, than the happy, beautiful sister he knew so well. He wondered that his father could have been blind to it, it was so plain. He supposed that that was called love. It was a strange, unaccountable thing, quite outside his experience; if it came suddenly like that, he rather hoped he should never be called upon to undergo it.

He sat there for an hour or more. The window behind him was open. The soft night air stole into the room, and moths came fluttering in with it and flitted about the lamp over his head. Somewhere out there the inexplicable drama was being played which was transforming the sister of whose every thought he had imagined himself master into a strange new being whom he did not know at all. But he would not get up and look out of the window; he would wait until Anne came back.

The door opened and Anne stood before him, in her

pretty girlish evening dress, with such a radiant look on her face that he could only sit stupidly and look at her.

"Oh, Hugh," she said, coming a step forward and standing over him. "I must tell you first of all, even before I go and think it over by myself."

"I don't want any telling," said Hugh. "It has been pretty plain."

Her face grew a little puzzled as she looked at him. "Do you mean to say that you know?" she said.

"How could I help it? *He* told me last night, and for two whole days you haven't spoken a word to me—if you could get out of it."

The sight of him sitting there, solitary, who had never had to sit alone since they had been together, drove a spike of compunction into her happiness. She bent over him and put her arms round his neck, resting her soft cheek on his hair. "Dear Hugh," she said tenderly, "have I been very selfish? I didn't know I had. I haven't thought at all. I have just been happy. And you must be happy with me. You will, won't you?"

"I suppose he's asked you to marry him?" was Hugh's reply to this appeal.

"Yes; and he has only known me these few days. I can't believe it is true—me out of all the other girls in the world! Oh, Hugh, I don't know what to do, I am so happy."

There was a quiver in her voice which pierced his

heart, but he sat glumly, without responding to her caress.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"He has gone to talk to father. He wouldn't wait till to-morrow." She laughed lightly. "Think what a shock it will be to father. You don't think he'll say no, Hugh?"

"I don't see why he should. He doesn't care a bit what happens to us."

"Hugh," she said, "you are not vexed with me, are you? You *are* glad that I have been made so happy?"

He pushed away the sense of blankness and dismay that was settling on him, and took her hand. "Of course I am, Anne," he said, and added boldly: "And I hope you'll go on being happy."

CHAPTER V

ANNE'S MARRIAGE

To say that the Admiral was surprised at the news conveyed to him by his guest of two days would be to understate the case. He was as astounded as if the attraction of a man for a maid was a matter entirely outside his experience. "God bless my soul!" he said. "Anne! That child!"

George Blomfield pointed out to him that Anne was no longer a child, but a beautiful woman, and intimated that no man of marriageable age could be expected to be in her company without wishing to make the request for her hand which he was now making.

The Admiral digested these statements, and, although he found further matter for surprise in them, did not gainsay them. He supposed he knew that Anne would marry some day or other, but that that day had already come—that's what took the wind out of his sails. Had Anne said yes?

Her lover said that she had.

"The young monkey!" said the Admiral. "She's lost no time about it. Where can she have got such ideas?"

George Blomfield embarked on a rapturous laudation of her state of innocence. Her nature, it seemed, was so perfect that she had never thought of love until

love had been offered to her, and then she had accepted it as the greatest boon in life; as it was.

The Admiral thought that explanation probably met the case. "She's a good girl," he said, "and she's had nothing to spoil her. I knew what I was about when I brought her down here and let her grow up in the country by herself, without some old cat to put ideas into her head."

George Blomfield cordially agreed with him that no life could have been better for a girl than the one that Anne had led at Foyle.

"Well, that's all very well," said the Admiral, "but this is a great surprise to me, and I must take a little time to think it over."

The lover pleaded for an instant decision. He must be back in Australia for the shearing, and he wanted to take Anne with him. He wanted to be married in a month's time and to spend a week or two on the Continent before joining the outgoing liner at Brindisi. He could satisfy the Admiral as to his means, and why delay?

The very boldness of his plea served him. The Admiral liked him personally, and had no objection on principle to his daughter marrying the man she loved. It was plain that he had no ambition for Anne to make a better marriage than that now proposed to him, for he made no demur to George's statement of his position, nor even to the fact that Anne, if she married him, would be taken away to the other side of the world. He supposed, he said, that they could

come home every now and then, and George said that they would.

In some ways, despite his wide knowledge of the world and his strong personal prejudices, Admiral Lelacheur was as unsophisticated as a child, and George found that he had little opposition to overcome on a point that he feared might have been difficult to meet. That he, from the point of view of an English family of distinction, an obscure Colonial, should be granted this peerless girl, whom the highest in the land might be proud to call his own, was almost too much to hope for; but when he found that the Admiral's ever-lessening objections to his proposal were not concerned with his place in the world he redoubled his efforts to remove those which in his eyes were none at all. And at last he succeeded.

"Well, it's all very sudden," said the Admiral, rubbing his grizzled head, "but I don't know that I've much against it. I sha'n't say yes tonight, but I sha'n't say no. Stop here for a bit longer, at any rate, and we'll see how things turn out. I shall miss the girl, of course, but I mustn't let that stand in her way."

This was but a preface to complete capitulation. George Blomfield had won his bride by a sudden stroke, and Foyle Manor was plunged into preparations for the wedding and for the long voyage across the seas almost before the Admiral had recovered from his stupefaction at being asked for his daughter. He made his escape to London, and Miss Wilkinson came down immediately upon the turning of his back. She thought

that a great mistake had been made, and said so to old Mrs. Bouverie, who disagreed with her. But Anne's radiant happiness and her lover's fine qualities reconciled her to the match, and she ceased repining.

To Hugh the month which elapsed before the wedding passed away like a dream. There were comings and goings. Sometimes Anne was taken to London, and he was left alone at Foyle with Mr. Williams, whose prophecies of disaster were of the gloomiest, and with Dunster, who foretold great happiness for his young mistress, and said he had seen it coming from the first, but was not at his brightest. Then the house would suddenly be filled again, but he was so seldom alone with his sister, and everything in their lives had so completely changed, that, when he was, he was tongue-tied, and responded poorly to her expressions of affection and of regret at their coming separation. The sense of blankness which had seized upon him when he first realized what was coming to pass grew, but during this month of June he had never faced it, nor allowed himself to think what his life would be when he and Anne should be parted.

And during that month Anne herself lived and moved in a dream, but hers was a dream of happiness. What George had told her father was true. Love had never so much as brushed her with his wings, and the awakening had been sudden and complete. She surrendered her whole soul to her lover without one impulse of shrinking, and never, thought that happy youth, could there have been so perfect a prelude to marriage as

theirs. Every nook of the garden which she loved was beautified to her afresh by his presence, and to him those green lawns and shady paths, with the scent of flowers and the warm summer air pervading them, was a paradise of delight, over which Anne reigned as queen.

And so the days drew on quickly to the great day that was to make Anne a bride. It was as quiet a wedding as it very well could be. Anne had only one bridesmaid, a girl whom she had known as a child at Hastings. George's best man was an old schoolfellow, and the only other guests were Anne's godfather, a distinguished admiral, still on active service, who made himself very agreeable and soundly rated Admiral Lelacheur for keeping such a rose hidden for so long in his garden; and Miss Wilkinson, to whom her brother-in-law was almost polite during the period of her visit.

On the evening before the wedding day, Dunster, whose sudden melancholy at the prospect of losing Anne had almost entirely been driven away by the unusual amount of bustle that was taking place, largely under his own directions, was uplifted almost to a state of ecstasy by the number of people upon whom he waited at dinner. Dunster prided himself upon his capacity to superintend a dinner, but during the whole time of his service at Foyle there had never been more than six people to wait on at the same time. Now there were ten, for the Rector and Mr. Williams were of the party, besides George and three in the house. There was

plenty of merriment, for Anne's godfather was as hearty an old sea-dog as ever cracked a joke, and most of the younger members of the party were in high spirits. Only Hugh went through the dinner with a heavy heart, and stole sidelong glances at Anne, talking and laughing as if she were not going to leave him for long years.

Later in the evening he stood by the front door of the house under the stars. Anne had gone down the drive with her lover, who was going back to the Rectory to sleep, and it seemed to him that she had been gone an unconscionable time, for he had something to say to her. To his great annoyance, Mr. Williams came out of the house, in a cap and overcoat, smoking a large cigar.

"Hullo, old chap," he cried expansively. "I couldn't think what had become of you. Been all over the house looking for you. Walk back to the lodge with me. It's a lovely night."

"No, thanks," said Hugh. "I want to speak to Anne."

Mr. Williams's tone dropped so suddenly that it would have been excusable to suppose that his previous elation was due to a slight over-indulgence in the pleasures of the tables. "Where is she?" he whispered, in a voice of profound melancholy, and went on, without waiting for an answer: "Hugh, I can't think that this marriage will succeed."

"You've said that before," replied Hugh impatiently; "the marriage is all right."

"No, Hugh," persisted Mr. Williams, swaying slightly on his feet and attempting to flick off the ash of his cigar with his little finger, which would not reach far enough; "the marriage is not all right. If I had had an opportunity I should have spoken to the Admirable—I mean the Admiral—about it. I have been in this house now two years, winter and summer, spring and—and winter, and the whole time I have been here I have—I have—— I forget what I was going to say, but you understand me, old fellow. We've always been good friends, you and I, and—and you know what your father is, always kind and polite, and I should have said to him——"

"I wish you would go away, Mr. Williams," said the boy, driven to exasperation, though he did not realize that his tutor's wavering address was due to any other cause than the state of nervous excitement that embraced the whole household. "It's my last night with Anne, and I want to speak to her alone."

Mr. Williams regarded him with surprised displeasure. "You wish I would go away," he repeated, with annoying deliberation, for now Hugh could see the flicker of Anne's white dress under the trees across the lawn. "Do you think that is a gentlemanly speech to make, Hugh? Do you think it a kind speech? Do you think if I were to say to the Admiral——" But Hugh had broken away from him and was running across the lawn towards Anne. Mr. Williams paused for a moment in astonishment and then made his way, a little unevenly, in the same direction, intending to say

a word of farewell to Anne on his own account. But, owing to the fact that he made for the point of the drive at which Hugh had intercepted his sister, he found when he reached it that they were already some distance away, and, pausing again to consider this phenomenon, forgot what it was that he intended to say, and went home to bed.

"Anne," said Hugh hurriedly, when he reached her, "I wish you would do something for me."

Anne came down from the rosy cloud in which she had been walking. "Of course I will, dear," she said, taking his arm affectionately, "that is—well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to wake me up early tomorrow morning and come out into the garden."

"Oh, Hugh, how can I?"

She spoke in surprise, as if what he had suggested to her was something entirely new and unheard of. And yet, during the past two summers, and during this spring and summer until George had come, it had been their daily habit.

"Don't you want to say good-bye to the old place?" he asked. "You are going away from it and you may not see it again for years."

"But there will be time. Why do you want me to get up at five o'clock tomorrow of all days?"

Only her reference to their old time of rising, which he had not mentioned, showed that she remembered the hours they had spent together in the freshness of early morning. "We have always done it," he said. "And

we shall never do it again. I have got up at five every morning for the last month—Dunster has called me—and you have never come."

Something in his tone touched her. They were standing on the gravel sweep in front of the house under the stars. The flowers of a giant magnolia growing up to the eaves scented the air. She turned towards him quickly. "Oh, Hugh," she said, "have I been so selfish as all that? And you have missed me? I have been so happy, and everything has changed for me so completely, that I never thought of it. Very well, I will come. I will call you at five o'clock, and we will do all the things that we used to do. And now I must be going in, and you must go to bed too."

She kissed him lightly, and ran into the house. She was sweet and kind, but she had consented to do what he wished to please him, not because she desired it for herself. He followed her upstairs, his heart still heavy.

He was awakened by Anne the next morning, and as she came into his room the clock on the landing chimed the hour. The uncurtained windows were wide open, and through them came the breath of a glorious morning. Anne was a little pale, but as he roused himself at her call she seemed so exactly like the sister who had awakened him so many times in the early hours of the summer day that for the moment he could not believe that this was not as others of those happy mornings.

"Be quick and dress," she said. "We have got all

the chickens to feed, and there are heaps of things to see to," and she went out of the room with a laugh.

His sadness returned upon him as he dressed. After all, would it be worth it? He had so counted on the coming hours, when he should once more have his sister back, the sister whom he had already lost—for she had never been the same to him since the man to whom she was about to give herself had come into their lives. He had thought that if he could have those few early hours with her once more, enjoying them with the consciousness of their happiness—as before he had enjoyed them unconsciously—he would be able to recapture them better afterwards, when she had gone away from him. Yes; but not if Anne was going to play with him, and, in children's language, pretend. His heart was too heavy at the prospect of leaving her for that. He finished dressing and stole down the broad oak staircase into the silent hall, as he and Anne had always done, fearing to awaken their father. But he went with a strange sense of unreality. It was not in the least like the opening of other summer days.

But after all his longings were fulfilled. "We won't feed the chickens," said Anne, when they had shut the hall door behind them and stood in the sparkling sunlight of the lovely summer morning. "I am too tired, for one thing, for I haven't slept much. And, besides, although I am going to be so happy, I do feel leaving this dear old place, and you, Hugh. You will be sorry to lose me too, won't you, dear?"

He looked at her in surprise. She had asked the question as if she really thought that the answer could be in doubt. Perhaps she had not thought much about it at all.

He turned away without answering her. She had changed indeed if she did not know, without telling, how much he would miss her.

"But I know you will. Poor Hugh!" she said. "We will go to the log hut and have a long talk together. There are so many things I want to say to you."

They went across the lawn, wringing wet with dew. Hugh unmoored the punt where it lay among yellow irises under the silver birches, and pushed it across to the little island on which they had built their hut two summers before. Anne had often been there with George during the past month, but never with Hugh. The place held memories for her which made her eyes shine as she crossed the threshold. But this hour was to be given to her brother.

Hugh regained what he had lost as they sat and talked, and more besides. It seemed to him afterwards that never had he and Anne been so close together. Always now he would have a share in whatever the years should bring her, for she showed him some of the secret places in her soul, the places she herself had never unlocked until Love had given her the key. And she showed that she understood him too. She was the same Anne who had taken him captive two years before and led him ever since, and her new experiences,

which he had thought had removed her for ever from him, had only seemed to deepen her sympathy.

She soon made that plain. "I am so glad," she said, "that you asked me to come out this morning, Hugh. You see, it all came so suddenly, and I have been so taken out of myself, that I have only had time to think of one thing. But the other things are there quite the same, and I know that if I had gone away without this last talk with you, I should have been dreadfully sorry afterwards. But you won't think now, when I am gone, that I haven't got room for you in my heart, as well as George, will you, Hugh? I shall always be thinking of you, and of the happy life we had here together when I was a girl. And you will forgive me for having been so selfish in my happiness? I never once thought of how much it would hurt you; but I see it all now, and if I had been in your place I should not have been so patient as you have been."

They talked on and on, of what both of them would do in their changed lives; made a compact to write to each other once a fortnight, whatever befell, and spoke of future meetings. Hugh's soreness was consoled. He had not lost his sister for ever; he had made sure of his place in her heart.

They talked for two hours, sitting just inside the hut, where they could look across the still waters of the little lake and the sloping lawns to the garden front of the old house. The sun climbed higher into the sky. The blinds of the house were drawn up and

the smoke rose from the chimneys. The world was waking up to Anne's wedding day.

Their long talk ended suddenly. Anne's face changed and she sprang up from her chair as she saw her lover coming down across the lawn towards the lake. Hugh rose more slowly. He almost hated George at that moment.

George did not appear to be specially pleased with Hugh when they had crossed over and Anne told him how long they had been together.

"Since five o'clock!" he exclaimed, with a look that was almost a frown. "How could you have let her tire herself in that way today?"

Hugh looked away without answering. Surely that short time need not be grudged to him. And Anne was used to getting up at five o'clock.

"Don't scold us, George," said Anne. "We wanted to have a last long talk together, and I should have got up anyhow."

His face cleared as he looked at her. "Sweetheart," he said, "I would have got up too if I had known." Then he looked at Hugh and corrected himself: "But you wouldn't have wanted me."

"You ought not to have come here at all, this morning," said Anne gently. She seemed to have forgotten Hugh, who stood silently beside her, and had eyes only for her lover.

George also spoke as if none but he and Anne were there. "I couldn't keep away," he said. "I thought you *might* be in the garden—and if not I wanted to go

round just once more and look at the place. We have had some of our best times in the old garden early in the morning, Anne. Come round now. We can keep out of sight of the house, and I'll steal away before breakfast." He had hold of her hands now, and was looking into her eyes.

Anne withdrew her hands. "No," she said; "I am going to be with Hugh until it is time to go in."

"We'll all three go," said Hugh gruffly, and was glad afterwards that he had made the effort, for during the half-hour that they were all three together his jealousy of the man who was going to take Anne away from him died down, and he knew that his sister would be in safe keeping. George Blomfield had a big honest heart, big enough, in spite of the room that Anne took up in it, to enable him to grasp the fact that his coming gain would be largely Hugh's loss. He had not thought much about Hugh during the past month, and he was visited with some compunction now that he realized how much the boy had been pushed aside from the place that had been his. There was not much time to make up for that now, but he did what he could to make him feel that he was not to be elbowed out of his place. Anne, of course, loved and admired him all the more, if that was possible, for his kindness to her brother, and Hugh, when at last he left them, felt that Anne's choice was on the whole justified.

Hugh was much happier now, and prepared to go through the dreaded day with fortitude. He had never assisted at a wedding before, but he thought that no

bride could have been more beautiful than Anne as she went up the church on their father's arm, but he changed his mind again when she came down on her husband's. He kept his eyes on her throughout the breakfast which followed, for the time was slipping by, and it was only a matter of minutes now before she would be gone. He tried to grasp the fact, and was roused from his concentration of thought to find himself being asked to make a speech. His expression of shrinking terror saved him, and Mr. Williams made one instead, and a very bad one.

And now the time had come for Anne to be gone. She hung round his neck at parting, and cried. They were the first tears he had ever seen her shed. It was all over in a minute. He caught a glimpse of her face as the carriage drove off, and turned away. There was a merry cheering crowd in the porch, but he felt that the house was empty.

CHAPTER VI

TROUBLE

George Blomfield had been rather surprised, when he and the Admiral had discussed the financial aspect of his marriage, to be told that Anne would have the income of some money left to her by her mother, but not the few thousand pounds of capital it represented; and also that she would have an allowance from her father, but that nothing would be settled on her. He knew that Anne's little fortune should have come to her on her marriage—in fact, the Admiral had told him so, but said that he could do better with it than George could. He had said nothing very definite beyond this, treating the whole matter in an offhanded way, and letting it be understood that a good deal of money would come to Anne by-and-by.

George had made no demur to the arrangements suggested. He was a little nervous on his own account, for, although he was his father's only child, and heir to large tracts of land and flocks innumerable, invested money was not at his command, nor the prospect of it, and in any case there would have been no possibility of making proper settlements in the time that would elapse before the marriage. The Admiral, on his side, had not asked for them, and George, who

wanted nothing but Anne herself, was relieved to find that money matters were to prove no obstacle to his happiness.

"If your whole income and prospects depend on your sheep stations," said the Admiral, "it is better that what Anne will have should come out of another basket. We won't talk about settlements at all."

So Anne had left her home undowered, and George was glad to have it so.

It is possible that this lack of formality, so unlike what would have been the usual proceeding in the case of a girl in Anne's position, would not have fallen out so conveniently for her suitor had not Admiral Lelacheur at this time been seriously embarrassed. He hardly yet knew it himself, but he had been guilty, during the past eighteen months, of one financial folly after another, and, if Anne had been marrying a man who felt himself entitled to ask for what was due to her, her father would have found it very difficult to meet his demands. Although, at the time of his purchase of Foyle, he was a well-to-do and even a rich man, he had become dissatisfied with his income, and now spent most of his time in watching his investments, and conducting financial operations for which his previous training in life had ill fitted him. He was an elderly man, and had never lacked money to indulge himself in any taste he possessed, but for some time past he had been dissatisfied with his income and desired wealth.

Reference has already been made to an old and un-

healed quarrel between Admiral Lelacheur and his elder brother. The quarrel had, indeed, been all on one side, and there had been efforts on the other to put an end to it. But the Admiral's narrow obstinate nature allowed him neither to forgive nor forget, and he still burned with anger, after forty years of estrangement, when he thought of his arrival at his old home, to find that the brother over whom he had always domineered, not content with taking the place which was his due, had put an unforgivable slight upon himself. Of course neither Sir Simeon nor his young wife, who was anxious to propitiate her brother-in-law, had been responsible for the unfortunate mistake. There was the younger brother's room untouched, with all his boyhood's treasures in it, and he only had to walk in and take possession whenever he wished. But it was among the nurseries and bedrooms in a part of the house occupied entirely by the family, and a new housekeeper, not knowing him, had assigned him a room among the other guests.

Explanations and apologies had failed to appease his wrath, and he had left the house at the earliest possible moment, with the intention of never returning to it. The statement made by Miss Wilkinson, that his annoyance was heightened by the meagreness of his younger son's portion, was probably a gloss of her own. His father had been a rich man, and had left him more money than, as a younger son, he had a right to expect. Jealousy had undoubtedly prepared the way for his absurd resentment over what took place,

and added fuel to it afterwards, but the presumed slight was alone responsible for his anger and for his life-long estrangement from his brother.

A man of so crabbed and unforgiving a nature as this must be the sport of circumstance in a greater measure than other men, and an occasion of as little moment as that of forty years before, at a time soon after the opening of our story, changed the whole current of what remained of life to Admiral Lelacheur.

One day in November he was walking through Grosvenor Square. At the door of one of the largest of those large houses stood a carriage, beautifully appointed, with two fine horses tossing their impatient heads. On their harness was the Lelacheur crest, and on the panels of the carriage the Lelacheur coat-of-arms. As the Admiral passed the door an old man and an old lady came out, attended by an obsequious footman with a powdered head, were helped into the carriage, and drove away. As they passed the Admiral the old man looked at him without a sign of recognition, and a mud splash, thrown up by one of the high-stepping horses, struck him on the cheek. His face became purple with fury. He stood on the pavement and shook his fist at the innocent occupants of the departing carriage, much to the surprise of the passers-by. "Curse you!" he muttered. "Riding in state and spattering a better man than you ever were or will be!" And from that hour his one ambition was to grow richer than his brother, and to draw to himself

every honour that was connected with the name of Lelacheur.

And so, in pursuit of this will-o'-the-wisp, the fine old seaman—for he had fine qualities in spite of his insensate obstinacy and churlishness—immersed himself in the movements of stocks and shares, in contangos and backwardations, and read scarcely anything but the financial papers. There was hardly a wildcat scheme afloat in the city but Admiral Lelacheur's name was connected with it. No promises of gain were so wild but he was gulled by them, and no reverses so great but he was ready to throw more money after what he had lost. By the time that Anne was married he was in difficulties, but his hopes were still high, and he looked forward confidently to making up for all his losses, and achieving his ends, by further speculations.

After Anne's departure Hugh settled down to a life at Foyle duller and more empty even than his forebodings had pictured it. All the brightness of his life had gone with her, and he could take no pleasure in any of his former pursuits. A month of incessant rain set in on the day after the wedding, and the burning August which followed it afforded no relief to his heavy depression. Late summer in the country gives pleasure only to happy people. The time of expectancy is over, the year gathering itself for its fall. The still, golden weather of autumn, with its dewy dawns and fresh liquid eves, holds an illusive likeness to the springtime, and slow decay, cloaked in so much beauty, weighs less

on the spirits than monotonous fruition. Hugh grew to hate those August days of hot sunshine, following one after the other with no break of cloud or coolness. With Anne they would have been delightful, but Anne was on the sea, steaming farther and farther away from him, and each day that passed was as dull and lonely as the one before. Mr. Williams had gone away for a month's holiday, and even the small solace of that companionship was denied him. His father was now almost always away. Since Anne had gone he had reduced the number of servants at Foyle and taken Dunster to look after him in London. Hugh had scarcely any one to talk to from morning till night, and if it had not been for his work his loneliness would have rendered him so unhappy as to have endangered his health.

He was not supposed to be working through that month of August: it was his holiday. But his father had not thought of taking any steps to make it a real holiday for him, and after a week of mooning aimlessly about, becoming more and more dejected as the days went by, he took to his books again, and, even after the first few hours of reading, felt better. Now he had discovered a way of escape from the worst of his loneliness. He had a definite aim in his reading, for it had been settled that he was to go to Cambridge in October instead of a year later, and he had to face the entrance examination for Trinity College at the beginning of the month. He mapped out his day into regular hours of work and exercise, and kept to his arrangements until

his tutor's return. So the days went by somehow, and in September the Admiral came down for a week to shoot his partridges, and made more of a companion of his son than before, even giving him a gun and a game licence, and allowing him to tramp the stubbles with himself and Dunster and the keeper. Hugh liked to think afterwards that his father saw how much he missed Anne and tried in some measure to make up to him for her loss. It was little enough that he did, but in later years, in thinking of his father, Hugh's mind went back to that week in September when he was kind to him.

The time of preparation came to an end, and when he went up for his examination at the beginning of October Mr. Williams told him that he was certain to do well, and, if he worked as steadily at Cambridge as he had done at Foyle, might look forward to taking a good degree. Hugh said good-bye to his tutor, cheered by his encouragement, but without any disturbing sensation of loss. Except that the flavour of the happy by-gone days hung about Mr. Williams in some small degree, he was not a regretted concomitant of his pupil's life.

Mr. Williams had altered since his return from his holidays, which he had spent partly in his native town of Huddersfield and partly amid the delights of Scarborough. He still paid the closest attention to his work with Hugh—his diligence and conscientiousness were his best points—but outside the reading hours he insisted more than before on his own dignity, showed

that he thought highly of himself, and demanded an irksome degree of deference from his pupil. Even in the Admiral's presence he showed signs of pushing himself and his opinions forward, but that ceased after a pair of bushy white eyebrows had been bent on him in surprise, and it was only when alone with Hugh that he allowed the sense of his importance to appear. It seemed that tutoring or schoolmastering of any description was a poor sort of life for a man who was a gentleman, and Mr. Williams would have none of it in the future. He hinted at coming wealth and dignity, but Hugh was not enough interested in him to ask how he was going to acquire those gifts. The secret came out a few months later, when he wrote from Huddersfield to announce his coming marriage with a lady whom he had known since his childhood. That he had not known her since her own was owing to the fact that her childhood had ceased some years before his had begun. She was the widow of a large ironmonger, and had been captivated by Mr. Williams's luxuriant hair and his ornamental manners. We take leave of him in a large provincial house exuding creature comforts, a figure in the society attendant upon his wife.

Hugh stayed one or two days at Cambridge, and enjoyed the foretaste of his coming life more than he had thought possible. Term had not yet commenced, and he was assigned rooms in the Great Court of Trinity, within hearing of the bells on the chapel turret and the plash of the fountain. He dined in hall, and

made friends with a few of the budding undergraduates who were undergoing the entrance examination with him. His spirits, depressed by the solitary life he had led during the past three months, revived, and for the first time since Anne's wedding he took pleasure in the thought of his life apart from hers. In his spare time he wandered about the courts of the college and the streets and avenues of the town, alone or in company, or sat and talked in his own rooms or those of his fellows, and came to look forward with some eagerness to the time when he would wear the blue gown of Trinity and share the life of the many men of his own age who would presently throng the now half-deserted streets and courts. Before he left Cambridge for his father's rooms in London, where he was to stay until he came up to Cambridge an admitted member of the great society of Trinity, he saw his name on the screens as having passed his entrance examination, and heard from his tutor that he had passed with credit. As he travelled to London he was happy, even eager, in anticipation of his new life, and he thought of what a lot he would have to tell Anne when he wrote to her by the mail on the following day.

He drove through the foggy London streets to his father's rooms just off St. James's, and, having arrived there, found all his bright anticipations for the time obscured, for Dunster met him with a grave face and told him that his father had had a stroke and was lying unconscious in his room upstairs.

The shock he received on hearing this news was great. He was young, and had no experience of the shadow of death. And he had seen his father two days before, a hale man as he had always known him, hardly to be considered old in his healthy well-preserved vigour. But when he heard that such a seizure as he had sustained was not necessarily fatal, and that the doctors expected him to recover, his mind resumed its normal tone. He had seen but little of his father, even during the two years he had lived at home, and had received few tokens of affection from him, and his own life was before him, now about to take on brighter tones than he had thought would colour it.

But as the evening wore on and he sat in the sitting-room, divided only from the room where his father lay by folding doors, sometimes alone, sometimes talking in whispers to Dunster, who came in and out at intervals, a shadow stole over him, and deepened. Dunster impressed upon him that the Admiral would probably recover, but his usually cheerful face was gloomy, and his own confident speech failed to lighten it. He showed more foreboding than was natural, if his words were to be believed.

At first Hugh's creeping fear only pointed to a fatal ending to his father's illness, but when he taxed Dunster with trying to deceive him with smooth words he was met with reiterated assurances of an almost certain recovery. "Indeed, I'm telling you the truth, sir," he said earnestly, "I've seen this happen before, and I don't fear for the Admiral's life, not this time at any

rate. And there's no reason why it should come back, not if he takes care of himself and lives a quiet life without worries. Don't you fret about that, Master Hugh. There's two doctors been to see him, and they both say he'll get over this."

Then what meant this ever-deepening shadow, and Dunster's anxious manner, opposed to his confident speech? Hugh asked him again as he was going to bed, when Dunster had come into his room. They could speak freely here and not in whispers. "What is there behind this?" he said. "You are keeping something back from me. If he is going to get better, why do you look as you do?"

Dunster prevaricated volubly. He had been with the Admiral, man and boy, for over thirty years. He had been a good master to him, and he was knocked over by what had happened.

Hugh watched him narrowly. "That is not all," he said, when he had finished. "I'm a man now, and I can stand anything that you may have to tell me. I want to know. What are you keeping back? What brought on this stroke? Yes, that is it. I suppose something must happen to bring on a stroke. What brought on father's?"

Dunster looked at him and gave way before the command in his tone and manner. "I'm very much afraid, Master Hugh," he said, "that the Admiral has had a serious money loss. His solicitor, Mr. Burham, was with him when it happened. They'd been together an hour or more, and when he called out—Mr. Bur-

ham, I mean—and I came in to him, he said: 'He would know everything, and I had to tell him the worst.' He was very upset, poor gentleman, but it wasn't his fault."

"Then you think my father has lost all his money?" said Hugh slowly.

"Oh! Master Hugh, I didn't say that. I hope not, indeed I do. But it's been going on a long time. I've seen it coming and——"

"What has been going on a long time?"

"Speculating, and trying to make a lot of money when there was plenty before. At first I thought it was all right. I could not believe the Admiral could go wrong or make mistakes. I gave him every bit of my savings to handle for me—not that I'll say a word about that, poor gentleman, if it turns out he's lost—it's him I'm thinking of. I've seen how it was for some time. A better officer never breathed—he was wonderful in manœuvres and suchlike, all the service knew it, and why he retired when he did I don't know. And I've been in action with him too, and seen the stuff he's made of. But amongst them sharks on the Stock Exchange he was no better than a baby, and it's my fear that they've fleeced him bare, and him an old man with his life behind him!"

The honest fellow was moved almost to tears. He had faithfully served his master for many years, and perhaps he had grown to love him, a man who had small power of arousing affection.

"But don't you think too much about what I've been saying, Mr. Hugh," he said, as he turned to leave the

room. "I may be wrong, and I hope to God I am, and I didn't mean to tell you anything till I knew for certain. Mr. Burham is coming again in the morning and he'll tell you all you want to know."

With this consolation ended Hugh's day of hope.

CHAPTER VII

SETTLEMENT

Hugh awoke next morning to hear the clock on the gateway of St. James's Palace chime the hour, thought for a moment it was the clock in the Great Court of Trinity, and was for that moment content. Then the memory of what had happened since he left Cambridge, and of where he was, loomed up, and the shadow crept over him once more.

It was eight o'clock, and Dunster came into his room. His father was still unconscious, he said, but he was no worse. Almost certainly, if he had no further shock, he would recover.

Hugh got up and dressed. He breakfasted in his father's sitting-room, with the muffled sounds of the sickroom in his ears. It had not been suggested to him that he should see his father, and he had not asked to do so. Dunster brought him a morning paper and pointed out to him a paragraph about Admiral Lelacheur's illness.

"How did it get in?" asked Hugh.

Dunster cast a half-glance towards the folding doors. "I sent it," he whispered. "I didn't dare write to your uncle, Sir Simeon, but I thought he might see."

Hugh was about to ask him why he should want

Sir Simeon to know, but the arrival of the doctor cut short his question.

The doctor, coming into the sitting-room after visiting his patient and shaking hands with Hugh, was cheerful and encouraging. "Don't stay moping indoors," he said, noticing Hugh's solemn face. "Go about and amuse yourself. There's nothing to be alarmed about. Quite an ordinary seizure, and he'll be about again in a week or two, as hearty as ever."

Anxiety on behalf of his father's life left him. Every one said that alarm was needless. But the shadow did not lift from his mind.

The lawyer came at ten o'clock. He was an elderly keen-faced man, and came into the room with something of the same cheerful morning air as the doctor. But it soon became plain that his cheerfulness was only the sign of the hour, and betokened nothing that he had to tell. It vanished when he sat down at the table with Hugh.

"I am afraid I have no good news to tell you," he said, paying the compliment of straightforwardness to Hugh's serious and collected manner. "It is a smash, a very bad smash indeed, and it is as much as we shall do to get out of it on the right side."

Hugh had never had anything to do with money. He had never had more than a sovereign of his own to spend at one time in all his life. If the lawyer had gone into figures with him he would not have understood him.

"You are not of age, are you?" said Mr. Burham.

"I shall be nineteen next April," said Hugh.

"Well, then, certain details which you will have to know may keep until your father recovers, which I am glad to hear he is likely to do. Still, in an illness like his there is no certainty, and Dunster, whom I know for an old and faithful servant, has asked me not to keep you ignorant of what has happened."

"I hope you will tell me everything," said Hugh. "I would rather know the worst."

"Then I will tell you the worst at once. Your father's—er—investments have turned out wrong, very wrong indeed, and from being a man of some wealth he will now be a poor man. I have feared that he would lose his money for some time past, and have warned him, but he would not take my warning, and it was not until the certainty came home to him that he realized the way he had been going. As you know, the shock was too much for him, and I was, unfortunately, the means of bringing it on."

"You couldn't help that," said Hugh awkwardly.

"No, I could not help it. I have known Admiral Lelacheur for many years, and liked him, but he was not a man to advise against his will."

"He has lost all his money?" said Hugh.

"It is not possible to say yet exactly how he stands. But you must be prepared for a great change in your life. That is what I wanted to warn you of. You must not expect that you will be able to go on living at Foyle."

Hugh had not thought much of Foyle. With Anne's marriage its chief delight had departed. But the news

that Foyle would no longer be his home caused him a pang.

"I suppose not," he said. "Shall I be able to go to Cambridge?"

"I heard that you had gone up to matriculate. You have not got a scholarship?"

"No."

Mr. Burham hesitated. "I cannot say anything about that," he said. "I am afraid that you will not be able to go to Cambridge until your father is better and it is possible to settle his affairs with him. Then let us hope that you may, if you wish to. Now tell me this. Have you ever seen your uncle, Sir Simeon Lelacheur?"

"Oh no. He and father were not friends. He never mentioned his name to us—to me or my sister."

"I knew that they quarrelled many years ago. It was then that Admiral Lelacheur put his affairs into the hands of my firm. But I thought that, perhaps, now—— Could you write to your uncle and give him an idea of what has happened?"

"Oh no. Father would be very angry if he knew of it."

"I'm afraid he would. I'm afraid he would. Well, I couldn't take the responsibility of doing it myself." He sat thinking for some time. "Have you any other relations?" he asked. "Any one to whom you could go until your father is better and we can see how things stand?"

"I shouldn't like to leave my father, and I have no other relations except my aunt, Miss Wilkinson."

The lawyer's face clouded. "Perhaps you had better stay here then," he said, rather shortly. Then his face became kind again as he prepared to take his leave. "I am very sorry for your sake that this has happened," he said. "It will make a difference to your life. I am afraid I do not see much hope of Cambridge for you. It is better that you should not buoy yourself up with false hopes. My own way is to take the worst and build upon that. Then it is seldom so bad as you anticipate. Good-bye, and do not lose hope altogether."

With this somewhat contradictory advice, Mr. Burham shook hands and departed, leaving on Hugh's mind the impression which, under the circumstances, was least likely to increase his disappointment in the future. He sat by the fire for some time and then went out and walked for an hour about the streets, not knowing where to go, or what to do with himself, either now or in the future.

When he returned to the house Dunster met him with a more cheerful face. His father had regained consciousness, but he could not speak; and on one side he was paralysed. Hugh, with some shrinking, asked if he might go in to him, but Dunster said, with a look of concern: "Don't you go to him just yet, Mr. Hugh. Please God he'll get quite well, but his poor face is all drawn, and you wouldn't take him for the man he is."

Hugh suddenly remembered that it was mail day, and he had not yet written to Anne. On the day before,

he had looked forward to telling her all his good news. It was very different news he had to tell her now. He said nothing about what had happened before his father's illness, except that he had been to Cambridge, and passed his entrance examination. "But I am afraid," he added, "that I shall not be able to go up to Cambridge now." And this was all the mention he made of his father's losses, for he would not give her all the bad news at once. His letter was bald and short, very different from the letters he had written to her every fortnight since she had left home; but there was very little to say, since he was keeping so much back, and although he tried to write as intimately as she would expect him to write, he could not, and sealed up his letter feeling very dissatisfied with it, and himself.

As he did so Dunster came into the room with an air of some excitement, and announced importantly, but in a low voice: "Sir Simeon Lelacheur." He was followed into the room by a thin old man, who stooped, and supported himself with a stick. He had very white hair and the kindest expression of face. He shook hands with Hugh, and murmured some expression of sympathy, of which Hugh did not catch the words. Then he sat down on the chair that Dunster set for him, and loosened his coat, and the white silk scarf round his neck, looking at Hugh out of a pair of concerned, blue eyes, while Dunster left the room and closed the door quietly behind him.

Hugh hardly knew what to say or do. He had a feeling of intense discomfort at the thought of his

father lying just beyond the thin wooden partition, and an instinctive fear lest he should hear the voice of his arch-enemy and burst the bonds of affliction to denounce him. He had never seen his uncle before. There was a great likeness to his father, although his timid air of kindness and courtesy was the antithesis to the Admiral's manner. Hugh had once looked up his family in a book of reference and learnt that Sir Simeon was only a year older than the Admiral. He looked ten years older as he sat opposite to him, bowed and nervous, with thin fleshless hands fumbling at the collar of his overcoat, but always with that deeply concerned kind gaze. It was some little time before he spoke, and, when he did, he spoke almost in a whisper, and Hugh had difficulty in catching his words. He, also, glanced towards the folding doors, as if he feared that the brother whom he had not seen for forty years would come in and find him there.

"This is very sad," he said. "Your father's servant tells me that there is trouble behind it, and that there is no one to help straighten things out."

Hugh did not know what to answer. "Mr. Burham was here this morning," he said awkwardly—"father's solicitor."

"Did he tell you anything?"

"He told me that father had lost all his money."

To Hugh's surprise a look of gratification came into the old man's face. "Then that may bring us together again," he said. "He has only to come to me. No, I will come to him, and we shall be friends

again at last. We were great friends as boys, and I have not ceased to miss him all these years. Has he ever talked to you about—about the old days?"

"No," said Hugh.

The old man looked disappointed. "I have talked of him to my son," he said, "a grown man now—older than you. How old are you, and what is your name?"

Hugh told him. He was strangely moved. This weak old man, so like and so unlike his father, seemed to draw from him something of the feelings he would have had towards his own father, if any consideration or affection had called them forth. He found himself telling him everything, his father's disappointment at his failure to enter the navy, his life at Foyle with Anne, Anne's marriage, his loneliness, and his own disappointment at the downfall of his hopes of Cambridge, which had been so nearly within his grasp; and his uncle listened with little nods and murmurs of sympathy, and a question every now and then to keep the stream of his disclosures flowing. And he asked questions about Hugh's father, as one might ask a stranger from a distant country about some one whose memory was dear, but from whom one had been parted for very long, trying to create a picture in the mind of a face, a trick of manner, or a word.

He put his thin old hand upon Hugh's as it lay on the table. "My dear boy," he said, "you shall go to Cambridge. And do not distress yourself about your father. He will forget all the unhappy years of separation when he comes to himself, and any difficulties he may

have to face will be taken from his shoulders. He will not refuse help from his only brother. I do not know the details of his losses, but he cannot have been to blame for them himself. He was always a strong man; and see what he has done for his country! We are all proud of him, and the time is coming when we can tell him so."

Much more he said in the same strain before he went away, leaving Hugh comforted, and astonished at the noble sweetness of his character. The quarrel which he had deplored for forty years he had not mentioned except as the unhappy cause of the long estrangement. He had taken no blame for it, neither had he sought to justify himself. He had spoken no word about forgiveness, he had simply wanted it all ended and forgotten. And this was the man whom Hugh's father had regarded with such stubborn rancour that he had never mentioned his name to his children. There was time for a postscript to his letter to Anne, and when it was written it was twice as long as the original letter, and told her everything.

He ate his dinner and talked cheerfully to Dunster afterwards. Both of them felt that the shadow was lifted, and Sir Simeon's name was extolled between them. Hugh went to bed almost happy.

He saw his father the next morning. The Admiral lay helpless, his face all dragged to one side, but with the old authoritative indomitable look in his eyes. He spoke with difficulty, but he was determined to speak, and the words came slowly and with painful pauses and

searchings, but there was no doubt of their meaning. Everything was gone but the honour of his name, and he trusted his son to help him to preserve that. Cambridge was out of the question now. He must work, and he must set about it at once.

The Admiral's mind was clear. He remembered everything that had led up to his seizure. Beneath the disfigurement of his face lay a deeper disfigurement. There was nothing but trouble and sorrow before him for the rest of his days, and he had brought trouble and sorrow upon others beside himself. He knew it all, and the knowledge had seared his soul.

Hugh listened to him in an agony of doubt and bewilderment. He longed to tell him that his troubles would not be allowed to oppress him, that the kindest of friends was waiting to lift his burdens from him, longing for reconciliation. But he did not dare to do so, and, as he stood by the bedside and listened to the painful speech, more painful almost than he could bear in its insistent hopelessness, the thought came to him that he never would dare, that this new hope that had buoyed him and lightened his spirits was destined, like his other hopes, to fade, and leave him to face a life stripped of all comfort.

It was Dunster who told the Admiral a few days later of his brother's visits. He had tact and courage, and he knew his master as no one else knew him. But even he had never gauged the depth of crabbed obstinacy that conquered every softer impulse in the Admiral's soul. When he heard that Sir Simeon had been two

or three times to inquire for him, which was all that Dunster told him at first, he broke into a passion that caused the faithful servant serious alarm. How dare he admit him to the house? If he ever did such a thing again he would be dismissed without warning. The insolence of it! Coming to gloat over him when he was lying helpless, and unable to give him the treatment he deserved! Sorry for his illness? A soft-headed fool without any brains might believe that. Dunster might believe what he liked, but if he disobeyed orders again he knew what would happen to him. It was long before he was quieted, and Dunster had a night of anxiety, fearing another attack at any time.

He told Hugh of his ill-success, and Hugh went to his uncle's hotel at once. Sir Simeon had come up to London alone from the country when he had read of his brother's illness, and the house in Grosvenor Square which had so aroused the Admiral's ire was shut up. When Hugh had told him what he had to tell, and left him, with the memory of the tenderest kindness and sympathy to carry into the dark days to come, Sir Simeon went back to Suffolk, sad at heart, but hoping still that he might be able to do something for his brother's son. With his brother himself he now gave up all hopes of reconciliation.

It was not until later, when the Admiral had recovered his mental powers and was beginning to recover physically, that he spoke to Hugh about his brother. He was considerate to Hugh in those days, pathetically apologetic sometimes, and spoke to him now without the

anger he had addressed to Dunster. "You didn't know everything," he said. "But you might have guessed that Sir Simeon Lelacheur, who is no brother of mine, has behaved in such a way to me that it was wrong of you to have speech with him at all. You have never heard me mention his name, and that ought to have been enough for you. I have forty years of insult to remember against that man, and I forbid you from henceforth to have any dealings with him whatever."

Poor Hugh listened, gloomily submissive. He had no weapons with which to fight what he knew to be groundless prejudice, and if he had, he could not at that time have used them against his father. Among all that he was losing, the friendship of that gentle kindly old man seemed to him the greatest deprivation.

He lived on in his father's rooms. He had nothing to do and nowhere to go. All possibility of the University was over. Mr. Burham no longer held out any hope, and his name had been taken off the books of Trinity. He did not know what was to become of him, and at this time he did not very much care. Whatever it was it would not bring him happiness. Of that he was assured.

His father paid little attention to him. All his time was spent over his papers, and in consultation with his lawyer; or he would lie still, with his eyes open, chewing the cud of his bitter thoughts. Hugh was told nothing of the way in which affairs were arranging themselves, but he gathered, chiefly from Dunster, that there was no hope of a settlement that would leave more

than a bare competence for those dependent on his father. He learned, to his great distress, that Miss Wilkinson's money had been trusted to her brother-in-law to invest in the harebrained schemes from which he had hoped so much, and that it had gone with the rest. It was an added source of disquiet in a most unhappy time.

Finally the accounts were brought to order and the best and the worst were known. Bankruptcy was averted, but when everything should have been sold that could be sold there would be left a few thousand pounds out of the many that had supported two families in affluence and would finally have come to Hugh and Anne. The portion that should have come to them in a year or two's time from their mother had gone with the rest, and it was the knowledge of this failure of trust, and the ruin he had brought upon his sister-in-law, that kept the Admiral sitting for hour after hour staring into the fire, with his hands on the rug over his knees, and a sombre baffled look in his eyes.

He was not without friends to offer him help and advice, but he would accept neither the one nor the other. Only one of them, more insistent than the rest, who came more than once, and saw Hugh moping about the rooms, useless to himself or any one, pressed for a decision as to the boy's future, and finally came with an offer for him of a clerkship in the Shipping and Mercantile Insurance Association, of which he was a director. Hugh was hardly consulted about the

arrangement. The Admiral accepted it for him, and, almost before he had realized the importance of the step, he found himself on his way to the City, embarked upon an occupation which was about the last he would have chosen if any decision had rested with him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TOWN

The Shipping and Mercantile Insurance Association occupied a large stone building, solid but unreasonably ornate, in Leadenhall Street, and Hugh had to be in his place in the great central office every morning at half-past nine. When it was fine he walked there, past the great club houses in Pall Mall, by Trafalgar Square and Charing Cross, and on to the Embankment, and so away from the streets of ease and leisure to join the stream setting citywards.

Along by the river the stream was comparatively thin. It was too early yet for the cabs and carriages of the men who gave employment to such as he, and most of those who kept his hours used the more congested routes. The broad grey river, under the slaty winter sky, was a consolation to him. Sometimes a breath of the sea seemed to be borne up on its tide, and the gulls circled over the bridges and the water and the roadway. Men who worked with their hands and not with their brains laboured on the barges, and others on the wharfs across the river. The wind blew upon them icily. They knew the pain of manual toil, but they had its reward. Though serving they were free.

At Blackfriars the crowd became more concentrated. Hugh was one of the thousands whom the streets and

buildings engulfed daily, each atom coming from far or near, where there was space and individuality, to swell the organized and collected power which would move forward one day the great engine of commerce. The stream flowed more quickly here, between the high stone walls. Those few upon whom it rested to invent and control seemed to be putting away from them the influences of their private lives, and to be wrapping themselves in the atmosphere of contest. Their faces were thoughtful, their steps quickened. It was these who set the pace, and carried with them the many who had nothing to do with guiding the engine, whose labour expressed itself in hours, who must be diligent and careful, but need not be anxious, who could carry their home thoughts as far as their office stools and could take them up again when the appointed hours of their labour were done, without one look backwards or forwards at the end to which their day's work tended.

Of these was Hugh, who, with hundreds and even thousands like himself, provided the power which moved the immense machine of finance, so many hours a day, so many days a year of accurate routine work, never varied, never ceasing.

He sat at a long mahogany desk in the large outer office, with a score or more of other clerks, each with his high stool, his pens and ink and blotting-pad. A double brass rail running the length of the desk held the heavy ledgers when they were placed for a moment aside. Entering, casting, comparing, indexing, the work went forward diligently. It kept the brain active,

almost amused, so that the hours slipped by and none of them were irksome in reality, though they might seem so in anticipation, if the mind were projected over a long space of time. Then the weight of day after day to be spent with the same monotonous regularity would fall heavily upon it.

His fellow-clerks belonged for the most part to that large commercial class which is on a social stratum below the professional—a class in which there is an immense capacity for steady unambitious work, but little enterprise. It is from a lower class, or else a higher, that those adventurous spirits come who fight upwards for commercial supremacy, who scorn the "steady rise" and risk its highest altitudes for something higher. Most of them were the sons of employees of the better sort, whose ambition did not rise higher than to be employees of the better sort themselves; a few were the sons of clergymen or doctors; but among them all there was not one of whom it could be said that he was using his time or opportunities with a view to anything beyond the upper posts of the service in which he had embarked. They took life as they found it; so many hours in the day were occupied by their work, and by their work they earned their play. They were interested in their few weeks' holiday, in their cricket and football and lawn-tennis clubs, in their days up the river, in their theatre-going and dances, in their clothes, in their love-making, some of them in books, a few in religion, some in horse-racing, some in politics. These were the things they talked of when they went out together to lunch,

or walked towards the stations from which they gained their homes, but seldom of the work in which they had just been occupied.

Those of Hugh's own standing, with whom he chiefly consorted, were good-natured or polite to him, but did not readily receive him into their fellowship. His upbringing had made him shy and reserved, younger than his years in the arts by which a young man gains acceptance among his fellows. He knew nothing of the things in which they were interested, and it would have been impossible for him to talk to them of the affairs of his own life, of the delights with which he and his sister had filled their days at Foyle, or of the ambitions cut short by his father's downfall. He was quiet and modest, rather too willing, if anything, to submit to the claims of the loud-voiced, and as far as possible from giving himself airs on account of a parentage more distinguished than that of his companions; but his name and his reserve and his air of melancholy marked him as different from the rest, and his loneliness among them did not decrease as the novelty of his position wore off.

When his day's work was over he would go back to his father's rooms in St. James's. The life he led there was as quiet as it could be. He would sit and read until dinner-time, and again after dinner until it was time to go to bed. The Admiral never read, but he was always there, sitting on the other side of the hearth looking steadfastly into the fire. He would sit thus for whole evenings and never speak a word. Dunster waited on them at dinner and he would sometimes speak to

Dunster, but to Hugh very seldom. Hugh got used to his silence. He would always rather have read a book than talked, except to Anne and sometimes to Dunster. But when the Admiral went to bed, punctually at ten o'clock, he went up to bed too. It was lonely sitting in front of the fire by himself.

The Admiral never went outside the house. Hugh would go out with Dunster on Saturday afternoon or on Sunday, and they would be merry together. Their relations were almost those of a child and an old family nurse. They walked in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, they went to the Zoo, to the Tower, to the National Gallery, to Madame Tussaud's, and sometimes to a matinee at a theatre. On Sunday they went to a church at St. Paul's or the Abbey. Dunster was ready to be amused at anything and everything, and Hugh relied on him largely for his philosophy of life. They spoke very seldom of the catastrophe that had come about, or of what would follow it, and when they did Dunster expressed himself with a careless optimism which could hardly have represented his true feeling.

One Saturday afternoon they were sitting under the pines on Hampstead Heath looking over the wide expanse of country that lay open before them, fields and trees on the level plain, with a glimpse of water, wooded hills in the distance, and no sign as yet of those creeping tentacles of brick which London would some day stretch out to claim it. Hugh had been reading to Dunster part of a letter from Anne which she had written before she had heard of her father's seizure. She

had written of her happiness, and of her life in the country in which she had made her home.

Dunster listened and shifted in his seat. His nostrils dilated and his eyes sought the horizon, where the sun was sinking in red clouds behind the spire of Harrow Church. "Ah, now," he burst out, "there's a life for a man! Life in the sun and the wind—room to breathe. It seems like Paradise after the soots of London. That there sun, he's on his way there now, bless his round face, and he'll shine tonight over a free and open country. Acrost the wide sea he'll go, with the ships a-followin' of 'im. I wish I was on one of 'em."

"You wouldn't go out there and leave us, Dunster?" said Hugh anxiously.

Dunster's lip shut down. "No, I wouldn't," he said, "not so long as the Admiral's alive. By him I'll stay till the end comes. But, Master Hugh, it's no good making up fairy tales. The Admiral, he won't live many years more—perhaps not many months more—and when he's gone, why then, you and me—that's a different thing. You're young and I'm hard. I'm thinking that'll be the place for us. You work hard with your body and you sleep deep. The winter and the summer comes and you're the same as them. There's a God above you. You take what comes and thank Him for it all. He'll see you through. You're doing the work He planned out for a man, sowing and reaping and feeding the flocks and herds. That's life, and that's how you and me'll take it."

Hugh looked out over the dark country. His eyes

were troubled. "What should *I* do over there?" he asked.

Dunster looked at him affectionately. "You'll do the same as Mr. George," he said. "Ain't it better worth doing than what you're doing now? And you'd be with Miss Anne."

"If I were like George," said Hugh slowly, "and if Anne wanted me."

"Want you!" echoed Dunster. "There wouldn't be much doubt o' that. Him too, if he's what I take him to be; and you don't make mistakes about men like him."

"You don't think father is going to die soon, do you?"

"Please God he won't. But he hasn't got much to live for, and you'd best look forward a bit. But there, I won't say no more. Here we bides for the present. But there's the great sea awaiting for us, and acrost it that land of plenty. They'll stay there till we want them. And now we'd best be getting home."

Dunster never spoke otherwise than hopefully to Hugh of the Admiral's complete recovery. He never spoke to him at all about money matters. Things went on as usual. Hugh lived in his father's rooms exactly in the same way as he would have lived if the Admiral had still been a well-to-do man and he had come up from Foyle to be with him in London. The rooms were comfortable and in the most expensive part of the town. His meals were simple, but well served. Dunster waited on him, brought him his tea in the morning, and laid out his clothes. Nothing was said to him about the salary

he was earning. He paid his own small personal expenses out of it, and kept what was over in a cash-box in a drawer of his dressing-table. He had no adventurous desire to spend money for the sake of spending it. He took everything about him for granted, looked but timidly into the future, and that very seldom.

In the meantime there were colloquies between Dunster and Mr. Burham, who came often to see the Admiral. Mr. Burham was a level-headed business man, whom the human side of affairs interested. He would always rather draw up a marriage settlement than a lease, and preferred a case in the Old Bailey to one in the Law Courts. The Admiral would only talk to him of figures, and kept him otherwise at arm's length; so he sometimes discussed his client's affairs with his client's servant, always in a rather stately, condescending way, and was relieved to have that outlet for a very ready sympathy.

"You must understand, my good man," he said one afternoon with his foot on the doorstep, "that the present arrangements are only temporary. The—er—catastrophe is so complete that when your master is restored to health—as I hope he may be—a change will have to be made."

"You mean on account of expense, sir?" said Dunster.

"Yes; these rooms are well enough for a man of means—even for a man of moderate means. But a hundred and fifty a year, or whatever they are—there will hardly be that saved out of the wreck for every-

thing. And, as far as you are concerned, I think you had better be looking out for another place."

"You needn't think about me, sir," said Dunster. "I shall be with the Admiral as long as he lives. But if I may make so bold—I've had a talk with the doctor, and I know my master too—he won't live very long. If you could so arrange it as he stays on here in comfort—I mean, whatever money there is left, don't keep it for the future, let him live as he's been accustomed to live for the few weeks as remains to him."

"H'm," said the lawyer, looking at him out of a shrewd grey eye. "You've made up your mind that he——"

Dunster broke in on him. "He won't last much over Christmas, sir, you may take it from me. I must go back to him now, or he'll be suspecting I'm talking of him. But you turn what I say over in your mind, sir."

Mr. Burham turned it over in his mind to such a purpose that he told Dunster, a few days later, to come to his office where they could talk at leisure. Dunster went, and was shown into a private room, where the lawyer sat at a big writing-table covered with orderly piles of papers, by a dusty window. There were engravings of eminent lawyers on the dark walls, and one or two deed-boxes japanned black, upon one of which was painted "Admiral H. Lelacheur, C.B."

"You're a faithful servant," said the lawyer. "I can see that. What about the boy?"

Dunster told him of his plans for taking Hugh to

Australia when the Admiral's death should set him free.

"I don't like that," said Mr. Burham decisively; "he has his foot on the ladder here. If he is steady —and he seems to be steady—he is in the way of being provided for for life without any anxiety."

"Yes, sir; but, begging your pardon, is it the sort of life for his father's son—a clerk in an office, and not much prospect of being anything else?"

"What else is he fit for? He must work for his living. A profession is out of the question for him now. A big Insurance Company like that, there's nothing to be ashamed of."

"He's barely nineteen, sir, and he'll be left all alone. He hasn't been brought up to look after himself. He's good, and he's got learning, but for anything else he's not much better than a baby. He's got his father now, and he clings to him—though he don't know it—and he's got me—for what a rough fellow like me is worth. But when he's left alone to face the world—ah! that'll be different."

"Have you made up your mind to go to Australia on your own account—when the final break-up comes?"

Dunster turned his hat round between his knees. His honest square face was perplexed. "If you put it to me like that, sir," he said, "I've got no plans that Master Hugh doesn't form a part of. There's his sister over there—she and him was everything to each other up to a few weeks ago, and he'll miss her more than ever now, if he's left here all alone. And

there's her husband. He's got a fine home in a great free and open country. It'd be his wish as well as hers that her brother should share it with them. Don't keep them apart, sir. Loneliness isn't what we were made for, and he'll feel it more than most."

"My good man," said Mr. Burham, "the matter isn't in my hands. There will be a little money over—a very little, I'm afraid—when everything is settled up, and—and, if a decision is called for shortly, whatever comes to the boy will be his to use as he pleases. He can go to Australia with it if he likes. Certainly, it won't be me who will stop him."

"Thank you for that, sir," said Dunster, brightening. "Whatever you'd say would be much thought on, and quite right too, you being a gentleman of experience, and kind-hearted, too, as I know well. I've turned it over in my mind many a time, lying awake at night and thinking of the sea, and the land over there that's as free as the sea. That's the country for my young gentleman to make a new start in and forget all that's happened here lately."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Burham, holding up his finger. "Is it? Is it the country for him?" He paused a moment and Dunster looked at him, his face grown longer. "It's the country for you, I don't doubt," he went on. "You're a man of your hands. You're not young, but you can turn to and make your own way out there as well as another, perhaps better. I know what you're feeling at this moment. I felt it myself as a young man, only not so strongly. You want

to get away from the crowds and the streets. You want room to turn round in. You want the sky—now that's it, isn't it?"

"Well, sir," said Dunster, "I won't say but what you're right. I hold it's the right life for a man."

"For some men."

"I'll stay by the Admiral as long as he's spared."

"But you are already living in the days when he shall be gone."

"And when he's taken, then I say we shall have done our duty, me and Mr. Hugh, and there'll be a good life coming for both of us."

"You are right to look forward to it for yourself. But for Mr. Hugh I'm not so sure."

"He don't like the streets no more than I do, sir. He's all for the open air."

"What you have to think of, Dunster, is this. Any man who goes out to that country—I'm not thinking of the cities, nor are you—must be a man of his hands, as you are. If he's not that he'll either sink or become dependent."

"He won't sink, not as long as I'm there, nor his sister nor her husband neither."

"Then he'll become dependent. Is that a life for his father's son?"

"He'll work. He's not one to shirk work."

"Not the right work. But I doubt whether the work he would have to do over there would be the right work. So do you, or you wouldn't talk of him as you do. Man, he's got to stand by himself. If you don't

help him to do that you are doing him no service. Put it to him fairly. Tell him that he has work over here that he can do, and that will keep him for the rest of his life. Tell him that if he gives that up he must be equally certain that he can do something else as useful. Then, if he decides to throw up what he has and go to the other side of the world with you, the responsibility will be his. Don't make it yours. Don't coddle him. Let him be a man."

Dunster was silent and perplexed.

"Think it over," said Mr. Burham.

"There's something in what you say, sir," said Dunster. "If it isn't right that he should go——"

"I don't say that it isn't right. What I say is, let him decide for himself."

"It's never crossed my mind to leave him alone, after —after he's lost them as is closest to him."

"It will be right for *you* to go in any case. Every man must live his own life unless he has a clear call to sacrifice it. You have no such call. Serve your master as long as he lives; that's your duty, and you are doing it well. But when he's gone it will not be your duty to spoil your own life for a young man who ought to stand on his own feet."

"Well, well," said Dunster.

CHAPTER IX

ALONE

Admiral Lelacheur died a few days before Christmas. He had a second seizure, which he survived only a few hours, without regaining consciousness.

The evening before his death he talked to Hugh, sitting over the fire. Broken in health and fortune, he may have had some premonition of the end, but his prejudices and hatreds were still strong in him. He talked quietly enough, but he talked of little but his feud with his brother, whom in some obstinate crooked way he looked upon as the cause of his ruin. "I want you," he said, "to give me your solemn promise that, after I am gone—and I don't care when I go now—you will have nothing to do with that man, or anybody connected with him."

Hugh sat silent, with a sinking heart. How much he may still have counted upon the help and sympathy of that kind old man who had expressed himself so anxious to help him, when at some time in the future he might be free to go to him, perhaps he hardly knew himself. Now he was asked to cut himself off from that unacknowledged hope, suddenly made real by his father's words. He made one weak effort to temporize.

"I hope you will get quite well again, father," he said.

"I sha'n't get well again," said the Admiral. "I

am too old. If I were younger I *would* get well again and I would still show that man that I was a better man than he. Now I'm broken; he has his triumph and I can't take it away from him. But you must promise me not to go to him when I'm dead. You wouldn't do such a dastardly, cringing thing. Say you wouldn't."

He had begun to work himself up into an excitement that caused Hugh an agony of fear, and snapped out the last command in a way that Hugh had no power to resist. "No, I wouldn't; I wouldn't, father," he cried.

"And when I'm dead—whether I die soon or late," went on the inexorable voice—"you won't have any dealings with him or his. Promise me that you will uphold my honour when I am gone. Promise. Give me your word of honour."

"Yes, I promise; I give you my word of honour," cried the boy, and killed his own hope and future comfort.

The Admiral became quieter, and talked naturally of trivial things until they said good-night to one another. That good-night was the last word he spoke to his son, for Hugh was summoned from his office the next morning at the news of his seizure, and on the same evening he died.

Dunster sent an announcement to *The Times*. It followed immediately after that of Sir Simeon Lelacheur's death. The two old men, once friends and playmates, parted for a lifetime, had come together again.

The funeral was in a London cemetery. Hugh would

have liked his father to be buried at Foyle, but Mr. Burham discouraged the idea, and he did not press it. There were paragraphs in the papers, and the old sailor was followed to the grave by many who had known him in the days of his success. His failure was of too recent a date to have divided him from those of his own world, and it was wiped out in the memory of those who had known him by his long and distinguished service.

But there was little consolation for Hugh in the sight of the many strange faces. One or two of those who had visited his father at Foyle spoke to him kindly before they parted, but the only one of the Admiral's friends—Anne's godfather—who might have done more than that for him was at the other side of the world, and the bustling and not altogether uncheerful crowd only made his loneliness more complete. Dunster, in the background, his red face convulsed with grief, was the only real friend he had amongst them all, and he would have given a great deal to be able to drive back with Dunster instead of having to share a carriage with his aunt.

Miss Wilkinson had travelled up from Brighton to attend her brother-in-law's funeral. She bore him no ill-will, so she told her nephew, but her mind was full of her own griefs, and her continual comparison of her former wealth and her present indigence were more painful to Hugh than if she had reproached his father's memory bitterly. She had had to sell her comfortable house and her furniture; it was nearly all that was left

to her. Mr. Burham had invested the proceeds of the sale for her, and she had enough to live on at a boarding-house, or in lodgings, but not enough to provide her with any of the luxuries or with the consideration which had added savour to her life. She had taken refuge in a mild form of religion, and spoke with resignation of her lot, when she remembered to do so.

"'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,'" she said. "I daresay it is all for the best; but, oh! Hugh, when I saw all the beautiful things that I had grown up amongst sold to strangers, many of them for a mere song, I could have sat down and cried. And I felt that I *could* not go on living at St. Leonards, where we were so respected, though I am sure none of our old friends would have made any difference in their treatment of me. There are many people where I am now whom I would not have known in the old days. But I must bear it; it is my cross; and, as I say, it is probably all for the best, though it is difficult to see it in that light; and it was my own fault, I suppose, for wanting to be richer than I was, when I had everything that I could wish for. I can't blame your poor father there; he put it all fairly before me."

"I suppose he thought that everything would turn out all right," said Hugh lamely.

"Oh yes. He used all his own money in the same way, unfortunately. And there would have been no advantage to him if my investments had turned out well. He just advised me for what he thought my good, and I must not complain if I was misled."

Hugh felt that this was handsome on his aunt's part, and he was grateful. But there was no warmth of feeling towards her in his heart. He knew her very little, and the reverses she had suffered could only make him uncomfortable in her presence. If she would have talked to him about Anne he would have liked her better, but when he spoke to her of his sister she answered him in a sentence and then went back to her own troubles. He was relieved when he saw her off at the station on her way back to Brighton. There was no suggestion from her that they should meet again.

Hugh went back to the empty rooms from which his father had been taken and sat down in his easy-chair by the fire. On the other side of the hearth was the chair in which his father had sat only a few evenings before, and for many evenings before that. Beyond the folding doors was the bedroom in which he had slept the sleep of a strong, vigorous man; in which he had lain ill and sad; in which he had died. Both rooms were his, and seemed to be only his; now that he had left them they lacked something vital; their aspect was completely changed. Hugh could no more have thought of them as his own than of a room in a hotel which he might be occupying for a night or two. They spoke to him with a voice that was almost audible, with a sense of desolation and intolerable loneliness. He looked round upon them blankly, trying to understand the meaning of the new sensations that were crowding fast upon him. His eyes fell upon a photograph on the mantelpiece—a group of the Admiral and Anne and

himself under the cedar at Foyle, taken in the early summer by George Blomfield—and suddenly the tears came in a burst, without any warning, and he sobbed convulsively.

Dunster came in later, and found him sitting in his chair with only the firelight in the room. The paroxysm of weeping was over. He would shed no more tears. He spoke in an even voice; asked Dunster to light the gas and leave him alone for another hour. Dunster looked towards him and obeyed, without a word.

He took a letter out of his pocket, a letter that he had received only that morning from Anne. It had been written immediately after she had heard the full news of the loss of their father's fortune, and their own. It was full of grief and affection, both for her father and himself. She made light of the loss of her own money, and Hugh had another letter in his pocket from George, who told him that they could do very well without it. But Anne explained that, although they had everything they could want, and were living in the big house that George's father had built on one of his up-country stations, their actual income was very small. Her distress at not being able to help her brother to the University career to which he had so looked forward, and which they had talked over so often, was very apparent, but she begged Hugh to promise to come out to her if their father's illness should end fatally, and make his home with her and her husband. And George had seconded the invitation. Hugh was to bring Dunster too; life in the Bush was the

best life in the world, and he could find plenty of work for them both.

One phrase in George's letter ran: "You will spend whole days in the saddle," and another: "As long as Anne and I are alive this will be your home. You may say the same to old Dunster; but Dunster will always be sure of a living anywhere."

Hugh was still looking into the fire when Dunster came in again an hour later. He sat upright, and said: "Come and sit down, and let us talk about what is going to happen."

Dunster took a chair and cleared his throat. "You've got a letter from Miss Anne, there," he said; "what does she say?"

"She wants me to go to Australia; and you too."

Dunster's face cleared. He slapped a big hand on a round knee. "That's what I thought," he said. "And Mr. George, he says the same, I'll be bound?"

"Yes, he does."

"It seems like Providence them letters coming on the very day we buried the dear master—and buried the old trouble too, I hope and trust, Mr. Hugh."

"Anne says they are coming home next summer. Of course she hoped to see father again."

"And he's gone. No need to come home now, until they come for a holiday. Home'll be over there now, for you and her and all of us."

"I am not going to Australia, Dunster."

He spoke quietly, looking into the fire. Dunster's face lengthened. "Eh?" he said inquiringly.

"You must go, Dunster. They want you, and you will be able to get a good living for yourself."

"Me go and leave you behind, Mr. Hugh? No; that I won't. And as for wanting, don't Miss Anne want you as much as she wants anybody 'cept her husband? I'll be bound she does, and I'll be bound she says so in that there letter, so as you can't mistake it."

"I want her too. Nobody knows how much I want her."

"Very well, then. Where's the sense of talking about stopping here? You don't mean it, Mr. Hugh. I don't know what you've got into your head."

"Dunster, I'm not a child any longer. A few weeks ago—perhaps a few hours ago—I would have done what I was told, and it would have seemed like getting back to summer again to go out there and live with Anne—and with you there too, and everything happy as it was at Foyle."

"Well, that's just what it will be."

"But now I know you can't go back in that way. It is all changed. If I were different, if I were like George, and could make my own way in the sort of life you must lead out there, I might go. But——"

"You could make your way. There's everything and everybody to help you."

"But I know I couldn't. Nobody would think of sending me out there alone. They would know that I wasn't fitted for that sort of life."

"But you won't be going alone, Mr. Hugh. Oh, don't take such thoughts into your head. There's me

will be with you as long as I live, and there's Miss Anne and her husband, they'll never let you want."

"That's just it. I'm to be looked after; and I know I should be, and everybody would be as kind as possible. But I can't live like that any more. It would get worse as I grew older. Would you like to see me in ten years' time living on my sister and her husband, and being taken care of? Dunster, I'm not worth much, but I'm worth more than that."

Dunster stared at him ruefully. "You're talking just like Mr. Burham talked," he said.

"Mr. Burham? Has he talked to you about it? What did he say? He has said nothing to me."

"I'm an honest man, and when I say I'll do a thing I'll do it, though it goes against me. He said you'd got a good job here, and I wasn't to talk you over into changing without saying so."

"Without saying what?"

"That you'd got a good job here. It isn't me that's saying it's good, mind that. No job is good, to my mind, that keeps you slaving away between four walls when there's the good earth to give you your living, and the sun and the air. It ain't the money, it's the life."

"Well, I've made up my mind. Mr. Burham says the same—but I wish he had said it to me. I can make my living here. I won't be dependent on others, now father is dead, however much I love them."

"And they loves you too, remember that."

"I shall see Anne in less than a year. It will be

a long time to wait, but I shall have that to look forward to. I know she will come. She will respect me all the more if I am making my own way. I know she will."

Dunster urged and pleaded, but all to no purpose. "I never seed it in your character before, Mr. Hugh," he said at last, "but when you take anything into your head you're to be moved no more than the Admiral was."

Hugh smiled at him ruefully. "I know I am right in what I have decided, Dunster; but, oh! how I wish I could go with you!"

"Go with me?" said Dunster roughly. "If you don't go I don't go, and there's an end of that. I can be stubborn too."

Nevertheless Dunster went in a fortnight's time. Hugh saw him off at Tilbury, and afterwards went back to the rooms he had taken in Earl's Court, to begin his new life alone.

CHAPTER X

WORK

HUGH'S income was about a hundred and twenty pounds a year. The greater part of this came from his salary, the rest from the very small sum of money that Mr. Burham handed over to him after his father's estate was wound up. Under the lawyer's advice he used this sum to supplement his earnings until, by an annual increase, they should reach a hundred and twenty pounds a year, by which time it would be exhausted. He had no other source of income to look forward to.

There was some interest in apportioning his expenditure, which he did very thoroughly: so much for board and lodging, so much for clothes, so much for daily expenses, so much for an annual holiday, and a margin for emergencies. Dunster helped him to do this before he sailed for Australia. It was Dunster who scoured London to find suitable lodgings for him, which he did at last in the tiny house of a respectable widow, who was persuaded to supplement an inadequate income by letting two diminutive rooms to so unimpeachable a tenant as Hugh. She was a thin-lipped, silent woman, combining a pitiful independence and some show of gentility with an almost incredible penury. She was careful to explain that she had been brought up a lady, and that nothing would induce her to let lodgings in

the ordinary way. Dunster succeeded somehow in persuading her that a gentleman of Hugh's quality might inhabit two of her rooms as a matter of convenience without being looked upon as a lodger. He would pay her rent and the wages of a servant. Her position in the world would thereby be improved, and she would lose nothing but the use of the rooms, which she did not need. The bait of a servant caught her, and for the years during which Hugh lived with her she did her duty by him loyally, but kept up the fiction that he and she were a lady and gentleman of ample means, each living in a small way for private reasons which did not concern the other. Therefore there must be no sort of intercourse between them, and any money that was involved in the arrangement had to pass with a great deal of circumstance.

Hugh was much better off than he knew. His two little rooms were kept with scrupulous cleanliness, his meals were well served, and even his clothes were looked after. For the money that he succeeded, not without difficulty, in conveying to Mrs. Millett he would probably have attained elsewhere a mean lodging, squalid and dirty, and a good deal more of his landlady's conversation than would have been necessary to his comfort. But Mrs. Millett persistently shunned him: sometimes many weeks would pass without his setting eyes on her; and he was as much alone as if there had been no one else in the house. It would have cheered his loneliness a little if she had chosen to talk to him occasionally; but he was made to understand, at an

early date, that they were to play at being strangers, and after a time he came to ignore her existence entirely.

Mrs. Millett's father had been a dispensing chemist, her husband his assistant. She had started her married life in the little house in which Hugh now lived with her. It had been well furnished for her by her father, mostly with things he had inherited. Hugh's sitting-room contained a Sheraton bureau and a bookcase, a round pedestal table with brass claw feet, two or three good chairs, and an unwieldy straight-backed sofa, and there was room for little else. On an ugly drab wall paper with brown poppies were a few old engravings in polished maple frames: "The Landing of William of Orange," "The Death of Lord Robert Manners," a full-length portrait of the Duke of Wellington, and a "Scene near Sorrento." Above the mantelpiece was a long mirror in a tarnished gilt frame, and on it a heavy marble clock, two ebony and ivory elephants, and two Japanese bronze candlesticks. Upon these household goods Hugh's eyes came to rest daily for some years. Foyle had been sold exactly as it stood, with all its contents. He had brought nothing with him but his clothes and a few books from his father's rooms in St. James's. He added to his stock of books housed in the bookcase above the bureau as time went on, and bought himself an easy-chair. Otherwise the effects which Mrs. Millett had assigned to his use remained unchanged. In the winter his window was curtained in crimson rep, in the summer in white

lace. There was a red cloth on the round table in the middle of the room. With a little taste and a little money spent on it the room could have been made charming. As it was, it was quiet and comfortable, and always clean and neat.

Mrs. Millett's own sitting-room, into which Hugh was never invited during the years he lived under her roof, but into which he sometimes peeped out of curiosity, contained the more intimate possessions of her short married life. Hugh often wondered what her past history had been. It was plain that it had contained a tragedy, but he did not discover what that tragedy was until some years later. Her father's brain had given way suddenly and he had been taken to an asylum, but not before he had disposed of his interest in a substantial business for a very inadequate sum. There was a lawsuit, which Mrs. Millett had won, but her husband died immediately afterwards, and when her costs were paid, and a sum set aside for her father's keep, there was next to nothing left for her. When Hugh had lived with her for some years her father died, and she wrote him a note asking him to find other rooms. He left the house without being given an opportunity of bidding her farewell, and thenceforward she lived alone, in comparatively easy circumstances.

In his little room, cosy enough in the winter firelight, Hugh spent his time after his day's work was done. He read a great deal, sitting mostly at the table with his head on his hand, as he had done in the old school-

room at Foyle; only here there was no Anne to keep him silent company, or to talk in the intervals of absorption. He practised his drawing by the light of the gas, his thoughts free to roam where they would while his hand was busy. At ten o'clock, or soon after, he put everything away carefully and went to bed. From the time he left his office in the evening until he returned the next morning he spoke to no one, except a few words to the maid who waited on him. He never went to a theatre or to an entertainment of any sort that cost money, except once in the summer of his first year, alone, to one of the open-air exhibitions then being held at South Kensington, and he did not go again because the crowd of people, most of them in groups, or at least in couples, made his loneliness painfully apparent. He did go to the picture galleries and the museums—many of his Saturday afternoons were spent in this way. On Sunday he went once to church, as he had been accustomed to do, and took a long walk, very often to Hampstead Heath, where he had been with Dunster. He was always glad when Monday morning came and he got back to the moderate companionship of his office.

He had two things to look forward to in the early days. The lesser was his three weeks' holiday, which he was to have in June. He had made up his mind that he would spend it at Foyle. He engaged rooms at the farmhouse on the outskirts of the village where visitors were sometimes accommodated in the summer. His and Anne's friend, the old rector, had died at the

end of the year, just before the Admiral, and Mrs. Bouverie had gone to live at Bournemouth, so both the Manor and the Rectory would be changed; but he had friends amongst the farmers and the cottagers, and he thought there would be a kind of bitter sweetness in seeing again the place where the happy years of his life had been spent, and consolation in the quiet country and the free air. He counted the days until his time of freedom should come. His longing to get away from London became a pain as the days lengthened, and he remained shut off from the calendar of Nature. Foyle would put him in touch with life again, and for three weeks he would forget the monotonous round of labour and the lonely crowded London streets.

And Anne and her husband were to come home in October. Anne now wrote to him and he to her every week, and her letters were his chief pleasure. He gradually formed in his mind a picture of her home and the life she led in it, in some ways so like the life she might have led in an English country house, in other ways so different that he was continually readjusting his mental picture, as one detail after another was added from her letters. He had thought of her first of all as living in the midst of a tropical luxuriance, full of colour and movement. Gradually the picture changed as he learnt of the seasons of stubborn drought, of the great expanses of burnt-up land surrounding the station buildings, of the shadeless trees, the deep silence. But there remained always the sense of space and freedom, and life on a large and patriarchal scale.

His imagination played round the group of buildings as a centre of which stood the house which was Anne's home—a house of deep verandahs and great airy rooms, somewhat sparsely furnished, surrounded by a carefully irrigated garden, in which there was something of that riot of growth and colour which he had first pictured as springing naturally from the fertile soil. He read of the numerous groups of buildings around the big house—separate quarters for the bachelors, who were learning their business on the station; separate quarters for guests, of whom there seemed to be a constant coming and going; the homes of those employed on the run, married and single; and the stables, sheds, and stockyards—the whole settlement as big as a small village, planted on the banks of a sluggish muddy river in the midst of a flat plain that stretched out of sight in monotonous regularity. He pictured to himself the men riding off after an early breakfast to the yards or the distant grazing grounds, and the women going about their household duties, making the beds, busying themselves in the kitchens and store-rooms, the merry cavalcades of the afternoons, the picnics, the calls on distant neighbours, the lamplit dinner-table, round which these men and women of English birth kept up the observances of their easy upbringing, while the still, aromatic air of the southern night stole in at open doors and windows. He read of the boundless hospitality which gave shelter and food and a welcome to the stranger, without grudge or inquiry. He caught a note of the talk that passed in that far-off

company, talk of sheep and cattle and the primal life of a vast pastoral country. He treasured up every little hint, every little sketch which could help him to a vision of his sister's life as she led it day by day, testing every detail laboriously and again and again, until he thought there was nothing he did not know about her and her surroundings.

Of his own life he was reticent. There was nothing to tell. His letters were full of questions about hers, or of anticipations of her homecoming. His first disappointment came when her visit was postponed from the summer to the autumn, his second—mixed with a strange new excitement—when she told of the expected birth of a child, and a further postponement of her homecoming until the following summer. A year to wait! If he had known there would be so long to wait he might have gone out to Australia and been with her now.

He went down to Foyle in the middle of June. As he drove from the station along the well-remembered road, in the cart that the farmer had sent to meet him, he experienced a kind of bewildered excitement, which merged into pain as he drove into the village and stopped at the farmhouse gates instead of driving on to the Manor. The place was so familiar and yet so strange. The farmer's wife gave him a kindly welcome, and added to her words of greeting: "Ah, if you'd only brought Miss Anne with you!"

He walked up to the gate of the Manor after tea and met some of the villagers he knew. All of them

asked questions about Anne, some of them about Dunster. None of them mentioned the Admiral, nor did any of them seem to be glad to see him for his own sake. He passed the Rectory and the church, from which a youngish clergyman, dressed in the extreme of Anglican costume, came out and looked at him as he would have looked at any other stranger. He came to the lodge, thatched and latticed and rose covered, where Mr. Williams had read with him and subdued his own longings, and looked in through the gate. He had a glimpse of the lawn and the cedar and the lake. Some children were playing on its banks with the old punt that Dunster had repaired for him and Anne. He knew that if he were to open the gate and walk up the drive to the house he would find most things unchanged there, for he had been told that the newcomers had brought no furniture with them, but had settled down in the house just as it was. He could scarcely believe that he was so near everything that would have spoken to him of the past years, for he felt an utter stranger as he stood there without the gate of his paradise. His diffidence forbade him to call on the people who now occupied his home and ask that he might see it again. He stood there for a long time and then went back to the farmhouse. The next morning he went away. He could bear no longer the painful pleasure to which he had looked forward through many months.

When Hugh had been at work in his office about a year he made a friend. Charles Kynaston was the son

of a clergyman working in a poor part of Liverpool, the eldest of a large family of boys, whose spirits a childhood of some hardship had not succeeded in dimming. He was a merry youngster, with tangled fair hair and blue eyes and a gentle manner, not exceedingly apt at the work he had now been put to do at the desk next to Hugh's, but thinking himself lucky to have the opportunity of doing it, and showing more grit and determination to learn than might have been expected from his otherwise careless happy demeanour. He made friends with Hugh at once, taking his reserve by storm, and conquering it at once with the exhibition of a good-will that was not to be denied. "Let's go out to lunch somewhere together," he said, on the second day of his clerkship. "I can only spend fourpence."

That sum was expended on a roll and butter and a cup of coffee, and Kynaston explained, as he ate it, that he could have done very well with a steak or a chop, as a morning's work made him ravenous, but that his weekly budget did not permit of such extravagance.

"I'm living on my screw, you know," he said cheerfully, as they settled themselves at a small marble-topped table, comfortably alone in the crowded shop. "It's a tight fit, but I'll manage it somehow. Now my cousin George, who is just my age, is at Oxford—New College—and has an allowance of five hundred a year. That's as much as my governor has to bring up eight of us on; and that's a pretty tight fit too, I can tell you. I say, where do your people live?"

"I've only got a sister," said Hugh. "She's in Australia."

Kynaston cast a glance at him. "Oh, then you're all alone here, like me," he said. "Where do you hang out?"

Hugh told him. "That sounds rather swell," he said. "I've got diggings in Camden Town. Pretty beastly they are too, but I couldn't afford better ones. I don't mind. They do for working in, and I work like the deuce."

"What do you work at?" asked Hugh.

"Well, I'll tell you. I've got a typewriter. My uncle gave it to me. He's a good old bird. He's got a great big place in Shropshire—I used to go and stay there sometimes in the holidays—and it costs him a lot to keep it up, so he can't do as much for me as he'd like. But he got me this job, and he thought I'd be able to make a bit more by typewriting. I'm swotting at it like anything. I made nearly three pounds last month. You see, I'm going to be married as soon as I can afford it."

"Going to be married!" exclaimed Hugh.

"Yes. Of course I'm a bit young—I suppose you mean that—and so is she, but we shall stick to each other, and as soon as I get a hundred a year we shall start. We don't mind being poor; we know we've jolly well got to be. Look here, I expect we're going to be pals all right, I don't mind showing you her photograph."

He did so, with a glance round at his oblivious fel-

low-lunchers, and Hugh gazed with interest on the face of a pretty and very young girl, who, if the photograph had not flattered her, seemed to have something of the same cheerfulness and courage that animated her lover.

"Ethel Reresby is her name," said Kynaston, as he put the photograph carefully back in his pocket. "She's a brick, and I expect you'll say so when you see her. We fixed it up directly I got this job. The governor didn't mind a bit, no more did the mater. They were married young themselves, and they say they've never had reason to regret it. And of course it was worse for them being poor than for me, because both of them were brought up in rather big country houses, and we've always been hard up ever since we can remember. I say, were you hard up when you were a boy?"

"No," said Hugh, with some hesitation.

"You needn't tell me anything unless you want to," said Kynaston generously, but with obvious disappointment at the brevity of the response. "I know some people don't like talking about themselves. I do, if I can get any one to listen to me." And he laughed gaily.

"I don't mind telling you," said Hugh. "My father was a sailor, and when he retired we went to live in a jolly old place in Dorsetshire. I think he had plenty of money then, but directly after my sister was married he lost it all, and he died last Christmas."

Kynaston received this somewhat bald narrative with interest. "Yours is rather a rummy name," he

said. "Are you any relation to Sir Simeon Lelacheur?"

"He's dead," said Hugh. "He was my uncle."

"Dead, is he? I'm sorry. By George! His place is better than my uncle's. We all went to Aldeburgh one summer, and we went over and had a picnic in his park. I never saw such a place, all red brick and gables, and the most lovely gardens. Have you been there often?"

"No, never. He and my father were not friends."

Kynaston's sympathetic face fell. "That must have been a bore," he said. "My uncle and my governor are pals. My governor will have the living at Marrobel when the old man who is there now dies—if he wants it, that is. But he's full of work, and he likes Liverpool. Still, it would be jolly for the young ones to live in the country. I say, I suppose we ought to be getting back. I like the work at the office, you know. It's rather interesting."

A few days later Hugh asked Kynaston to spend the evening with him. It was the first time he had entertained any one in his life. Kynaston was unenviously appreciative of his quarters. "By George!" he said. "This is slap-up. Jolly quiet and jolly clean! You should see my digs! But I don't mind; they're good enough for me for the present. I suppose you're pretty rich, Lelacheur?"

Hugh told him what his income was. Reserve was impossible in face of Kynaston's expansive confidences. "I daresay it doesn't seem much to you," Kynaston

said, "brought up like you were; but if I had it I would get married tomorrow, and think myself lucky. So would Ethel. You don't mind my calling her Ethel to you, old chap, do you? You see, I've got no one to talk to about it now, and if I don't talk to somebody I feel I shall burst."

Hugh said that he did not mind, and they sat down on the sofa to continue the conversation. Neither of them smoked; Kynaston because it was an extravagance he could not afford in face of his plans for the future, Hugh because it had never occurred to him to do so.

"I think you would find it rather a tight fit, as you say, to get married on a hundred and twenty a year," said Hugh.

"Tight fit!" echoed Kynaston. "I'm going to get married on a hundred a year. A hundred and twenty would be luxury. Look here, I'll tell you all about it. I didn't know how the governor would take it when I first broke it to him. You see, I'm only nineteen and she's not quite eighteen. Well, he was a bit surprised at first, and said he must think it over. He never decides in a hurry, the governor, but, on the other hand, he always listens to what you've got to say. After he'd thought it over for a day or so he said he'd no objection to the engagement. 'You may both change your minds,' he said, 'and if you do, say so frankly. You won't be able to marry for some years yet, but it won't do you any harm to be engaged in the meantime, and what you've got to do, my son, is to keep straight and remember you haven't only got yourself

to think about. You must spend as little as you can, and be careful of every penny. Then, if you're both of the same mind when you are making enough to marry on, you'll be able to face poverty together and know what you're doing. I don't think you'll ever make much money, but there is no reason why you shouldn't both be happy on very little.' Now wasn't that a good way of putting it, Lelacheur? I ask you as a friend."

Hugh thought it was a very good way of putting it, and Kynaston was encouraged to expatiate further on the interest it gave you in life to have something to look forward to. "That's what everybody wants," he said—"something to look forward to. Now don't you agree with me, Lelacheur?"

Hugh said he supposed he did. His own life would be very dull if he could not look forward to seeing his sister next year.

Kynaston looked doubtful at this. "That will be a great pleasure for you, of course," he said. "But you want something more than that, you know. I mean to say, that won't last for long. You're not content with this life for its own sake, are you? You wouldn't care to go to the office every day and come home here by yourself and just go on getting a little better off every year."

"I don't see much use in troubling about it," said Hugh. "I've got to do it."

Kynaston looked thoughtful. "Now look here, Lelacheur," he said. "I like you; I took to you at once

the moment I saw you. The other chaps in the office are all right, but they are different somehow. It seems good enough for them to go on playing at figures all their lives, and as for me, well, I'm not much good at that, but I'm no good at all at anything else, so I've got to grin and bear it. But it doesn't seem the right thing for you. I remember my governor saying once in a sermon that everybody ought to be discontented. I didn't quite understand what he meant at the time, but somehow it seems to fit you. You ought not to be contented."

Hugh smiled rather bitterly. "If I began to encourage myself to be discontented," he said, "I should be a great deal more unhappy than I am."

Kynaston turned this saying over in his mind. "Are you unhappy?" he asked.

The desire for self-revelation surged up in Hugh's mind and nearly brimmed over, but his native reserve and the shadow of a whole year of almost speechless aloofness drove it back. "Oh, not particularly," he said. "I don't mind the work, and when I come back here I read, and paint a bit. I like painting—or trying to. I wish I could have been an artist."

"Ah, there you are!" said Kynaston triumphantly. "I thought there was something you could do. Let's have a look at your things. Do you mind?"

Hugh showed him various sketch-books. Kynaston was enthusiastic. "By George! I never saw anything better," he said. "Is that where you used to live? What a jolly place! Any one could see that was

meant for water. My dear fellow, if you want to be an artist, why ever don't you? I'm not much of a judge, but anybody could see these are first rate."

Hugh smiled. "I don't think you can be much of a judge," he said. "Those you are looking at are very bad. Perhaps I have improved a bit lately, and anyhow I get a bit of pleasure out of it. But I know quite well I could not make a living as an artist."

"Well, I don't see why not. You could if you'd been taught."

"Perhaps I might have been able just to scrape up a living. I don't know. I do know that if I could have had just a bit of teaching when my father lost his money I would have been pleased to risk it. I'll tell you what I would have done, Kynaston. I would have wandered about all over the country, painting, and I would have lived on as little as ever anybody could live on. And I should have been as happy as a king. I love the country. It means more to me than I can tell you. Oh, why couldn't I have done something of that sort instead of living like this!"

He threw up his head with a tragic gesture. Kynaston stared at him. "Do you feel as much as that about it?" he asked. "You wouldn't have been half so comfortable as you are now."

"What do I care about being comfortable?" said Hugh. "Sometimes I feel choked, living like this and going into the city every morning. Just think what a life like that would have been. Nothing to tie you anywhere! You would go to the most beautiful places in

the world. You would be working hard all day, perhaps, but you would enjoy your work more than anything else. If only I'd said something to my father! I was thinking of it all the time. Everybody talked as if being poor was the most terrible thing. I would much rather have been poor and lived that life than have been rich."

"Well, why didn't you?" asked Kynaston again.

Hugh's excitement died down again suddenly. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "He wouldn't have listened to me. And I daresay I shouldn't have made any money at all. It is too late now, anyhow. Let's put the things away."

They dined together later and spent a quiet evening, discussing the future as it concerned Kynaston and the past as it concerned Hugh. Hugh went to bed with a heart lighter than it had been for a long time. It was pleasant to have found a friend to talk to.

CHAPTER XI

TEN YEARS AFTER

TEN years went over Hugh's head, and Anne did not come home. A boy was born to her about Christmas time. Hugh had a letter from George, enclosing a few pencilled lines from Anne, who told him that the child would be called by his name. It was delicate from the first, and Hugh, whose sympathy with his sister's hopes and fears was kept at its keenest by their never-remitted correspondence, was deeply grieved when he received a cable in the early spring announcing the baby's death. There had been no word in Anne's letters for some time about coming to England. A year after came a girl, a little Anne, whose career Hugh followed with absorbing interest, through his sister's letters, from babyhood onwards. She was a quiet child, Anne wrote, a thorough Lelacheur, but more like him than herself. Childish ailments, coming at the most inconvenient time, prevented the journey home more than once. Then came a bad drought, and after that a bank crisis, which kept George Blomfield in Australia, and following these vicissitudes, George's father, the old squatter, died, full of years and honour, and the visit was delayed once more.

In the meantime Hugh's life was coloured more by events that took place on the other side of the world

than by any changes in his own surroundings. The three weeks of his yearly holiday stood out beyond anything else in the monotonous months. He did not go again to Foyle, nor indeed to the west country. One year he went to Scotland, twice to the Lakes, to Wales, to Brittany, and later to Switzerland, and the Black Forest. He sought out always some quiet and beautiful place, and stayed there until it was time to go back to his work, never travelling about. The hills and the water and the forests soothed and consoled him, but during the first few days he spent among them the monotony of the dull confined life he had escaped smote him more than at other times. He began to look forward, after many years, to retiring and settling down in peace amongst woods and fields.

His friendship with Kynaston continued and increased. He never visited his friend at his poor apology for a home, but Kynaston dined with him once a week and they were much together at other times. Hugh was a good deal better off than his friend. He had more aptitude for the work they were both engaged upon, and rose to a position of some responsibility sooner than he had had any reason to anticipate. Miss Wilkinson, meekly resigned to her lot, died about the time that he had to leave Mrs. Millett's house, and left him the small remains of her former fortune. He moved to larger rooms, which he furnished himself, and for a bachelor of inexpensive tastes and habits was well off. Kynaston struggled mightily to rise above the level of poverty, never quite succeeding. He watched

Hugh's rise without jealousy, and indeed he was the happier of the two, and his ingenious economies gave him more pleasure than his friend gained from his moderate prosperity. He worked hard out of office hours at his typewriting. The men and women engaged in that pursuit were fewer then than they have since become, and he had as much work as he could accomplish.

"I've had to refuse a good order," he told Hugh one evening when they were together. "I can't cram in another half-hour's work. I worked till one o'clock last night and went to sleep over the machine."

An idea occurred to Hugh which he thought over carefully for a day or two. It was at the time when he had received the money left him by his aunt, part of which he had expended in furnishing his rooms. A week later he proposed to Kynaston that he should lend him money to start a typewriting office, in which he could employ salaried assistants, he himself superintending them and busying himself in acquiring a further connection.

Kynaston was at first startled and then excited at the suggestion. "I believe it would pay," he said. "I could get a lot more people if I tried."

"You would have to give up your work at the office," Hugh reminded him.

Kynaston became thoughtful. "That's a certainty, and this is a risk," he said.

Hugh made no reply.

"There's another thing," said Kynaston, "I'd take a loan from you, old chap, with as much pleasure as

you would offer it to me; but I don't care much about having any sort of a debt. It complicates matters." He rubbed his fair towzled hair perplexedly. It was plain that he was attracted by the idea. "I believe it would pay," he said again.

"I'm pretty sure it would," replied Hugh. "Your heart would be in it, for one thing, and you would be working for yourself and not for somebody else."

"Not quite for myself, either," put in Kynaston.

"Well, no. But you will never go very far in the office. You know your work as well as you can, but you don't care for it."

"And I should care for this. You're quite right, and I'm ever so much obliged to you. Why, she and I could do it together, Lelacheur, if it turned out well, and we could get married on it. I should have girls to do the work and she could look after them. It would be glorious. But I don't know. I'm not sure."

"As far as my money goes," said Hugh, "you can pay me five per cent. interest on it. I should be glad to have it out at that as long as it was worth your while to keep it in the business. There would be no obligation. It would suit me as well as you."

"It's most awfully good of you," said Kynaston again; "I'll think it over very carefully."

Finally a modified arrangement was come to. Kynaston was not to resign his clerkship for six months, nor to take an office, but he was to employ as many assistants, working at their own homes, as he could find employment for. By the end of that time, if he had

enough regular work to justify the plunge, he was to take it. It gave Hugh an added interest in life to watch the progress of the experiment, and to encourage Kynaston in his anxious labours. These succeeded as well as either of them could have expected, and at the end of the appointed period of probation Kynaston cut himself adrift from the Insurance Company and opened his own modest office. Six months later he was married.

Hugh, at this time twenty-six years of age, but grave and reserved beyond his years, played the part of benefactor to the young couple, both of whom regarded him with affection, and almost with reverence. His wedding present was a cheque, handsome enough for one of his means, that only a sort of stately tact with which nature and solitude had endowed him enabled him to induce them to accept. With part of it they furnished the two rooms in which they were to begin their married life and with part they paid for a week's honeymoon. Hugh went to Liverpool and acted as his friend's best man. He was treated by Kynaston's father and mother with great consideration, and by Kynaston's many brothers, who were all of a very lively disposition, as a guest of honour, but not one with whom they could associate on equal terms. When he had seen the bride and bridegroom off to their honeymoon in the Lake District he went back to London, wishing that he had been able to take a more active part in the diversions of the family, and wondering whether his youth were already over at twenty-six.

Kynaston's venture prospered moderately. He and his young wife threw themselves into it with enthusiasm and were as happy as possible. Before their first child, to whom Hugh stood godfather, was born they moved into a tiny house, at which Hugh was a constant visitor, and at which he always received the warmest welcome. It was the only house, with the exception of Kynaston's father's, at which he had ever visited since his boyhood, and they were his only friends.

. . . . . .

At last, ten years after Anne had left England, Hugh found himself one afternoon in the month of June waiting on the platform of the London terminus where the train would presently arrive which would bring his sister to him from her long voyage across the sea. He was nearly half-an-hour too early. He paced up and down underneath the spread of the iron girders and ties, and saw the blue sky like a wall at the far end of the arched roof, with the rows of steel rails curving away under it between the houses. He was now twenty-eight, a thin, dark young man, dressed with the inconspicuous neatness of a city clerk, but with a certain grave distinction of bearing which his well-worn clothes could not detract from. The people who presently began to fill the platform, waiting like himself to greet their friends from the other side of the world, all looked at him as he walked up and down, and some of them wondered audibly who he might be.

The hands of the big clock crept on; groups of

porters strolled in a leisurely way on to the platform and stood talking at its edge; one of the signals on the bridge across the rails fell; an engine appeared round the curve and rolled slowly in towards them with its heavy freight; the train came to a standstill, and instantly there was a scene of bustle and greeting. Hugh's heart beat violently; he could not see Anne or her husband in the crowd, and he had an unaccountable impulse to turn and go away before they should show themselves. Then he saw Anne coming towards him with outstretched hands—the old, dear Anne, with her dark eyes smiling at him and her mouth trembling a little. The ten long years of separation were bridged by their embrace, and they were as close together as if they had never been parted. George Blomfield, bronzed and bearded, and a good deal bigger than when he had last seen him, gave him a mighty grasp of the hand. By his side was a little girl, who looked up at Hugh gravely out of her mother's eyes, and took her hand out of her father's and put it into his.

Hugh drove with them to their hotel, where he was to stay as long as they should be in London.

"We sha'n't be here long," said George, as they drove through the streets. "We want the green fields. Anne has fixed up a little surprise for you. Come, out with it, Anne."

"I will tell him when we get to the hotel," said Anne.

George bore the child away when they were once in the rooms that had been engaged for them, and left the brother and sister alone together.

"Oh, Hugh!" said Anne, taking both his hands in hers, "it breaks my heart to see you looking so old and grave."

"Not grave now that I have you with me," answered Hugh.

"It has been so much worse for you than for me," said Anne. "I have had George and my little girl, and you have had nobody."

"I have had you. You have never been far from my thoughts, and your happiness has been mine, as well as your sorrows."

Anne's eyes filled with tears. "My poor little baby boy," she said. "I thought I never should get over that. But little Anne came to make amends, and I have got the best husband in the world. Yes, I have been happy, and now that I have come back to you for a time I want nothing else in the world. We will live the old days over again, Hugh."

"Not at Foyle, I am afraid," said Hugh.

Anne smiled at him. "Yes, at Foyle," she said. "That was my secret. George has taken Foyle for the summer, and you are to come down there with us on Saturday. He arranged it by mail through an agent, and we determined to tell you nothing about it till it was all settled."

Hugh, alone in his bedroom dressing for dinner, found himself whistling. He broke off in consternation at himself. He had not done such a thing for ten years.

They all went to a theatre that evening. Little Anne, sitting between Hugh and her father, looked

around her in open-eyed astonishment, and during the first act kept her eyes fixed upon the unaccountable beings on the stage before her. During the interval Hugh answered her many questions, which seemed to show that the dramatist had not made his purpose as clear as he might have done. Little Anne, however, appeared satisfied with her uncle's explanations, and, at the beginning of the second act, leaned her head against his arm and went quietly to sleep.

"She has taken wonderfully to you," whispered Anne, in the darkness.

Hugh made no reply, but he saw little of the play during that act, his heart was so full of a new sensation.

When Anne had put the child to bed Hugh went in to say good-night to her. She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. "Are you going to stay with us, Uncle Hugh?" she asked. Being satisfied on this point, she said: "I'm very glad," and went immediately to sleep.

Two days later they travelled down to Foyle together. Little Anne sat by Hugh in the train, and looked out of the window. She asked him many questions: about the rain that was falling heavily, and whether he thought it would stop when they reached the end of their journey; about the long miles of houses and suburbs; about the greenness of the trees and fields, which she called paddocks, remarking gravely on their smallness: about the country roads and hedgerows; about the tents at Aldershot; about the towns and vil-

lages through which they passed, and especially about the tunnels. She spoke quietly and slowly, but as if she expected her inquiries to receive serious attention. Her father teased her lovingly, and every now and then summoned her to a lionlike embrace. She rebuked him for his foolish speeches, kissed him when he hugged her, and then returned to her seat by Hugh and again took up the thread of her observations. Anne chatted gaily. She seemed very little older than when she had first travelled down to Foyle with her father, but she would fall suddenly silent, and her eyes told tales as she looked at her brother and her little daughter.

The train drew up at Southampton. The rain had ceased and patches of blue showed through the clouds. There were the mudflats and the children playing on them, the yachts at anchor and the salt smell of the sea. "This is where Uncle Hugh and I met when we first went down to live at Foyle together," she told the child. "Do you remember, Hugh?"

Hugh looked at her without speaking. It was very plain that he remembered.

George captured the child, and Anne and Hugh talked together as they went on through the deep glades and across the heaths of the New Forest, with a stop at Bournemouth, and on again through the resinous odour of pines, past the shining expanse of Poole Harbour, and into the beautiful Dorsetshire country, which has been made to live as no other county in England has been made to live, by the hand of a master. "Do you remember this?" they said to one another,

and: "How that brings it all back!" Once again they were boy and girl together, with no sorrows saddening their memory, and no shadow from the future lying across their path.

They came in the late afternoon to Lydmouth, perched in a hollow of the cliffs facing the sea and the broad sands, and drove through the well-remembered country to Foyle. The same waggonette in which they had first made the journey carried them quickly along through rain-washed air, and the familiar scents and sounds greeted them as they passed one unchanged landmark after another. Anne's laughing pleasure came very near to tears as they drove over the bridge, and saw the river and the trees and the thatched cottages of Foyle before them. The child gazed about her wonderingly. She sat with one of her hands in Hugh's, the other in her mother's, and seemed to be in accord with everything they felt. They came to the Manor, unaltered within and without. The sense of home-coming was almost bewildering as they stood in the cool hall and saw the half-forgotten but all familiar things around them.

"You two go and look round the house," said George. "Little Anne and I will go down to the lake and see if we can find the old punt."

Anne and Hugh went through the old rooms together. When they came to the schoolroom they stood silent and looked about them. It was rather shabbier than of old, but scarcely anything had been altered in it. The furniture was the same and the carpet and

the wallpaper. They called each other's attention to little things. There was the smoke stain on the old-fashioned marble mantelpiece; the first half of Anne's name scratched on the window-pane; the same old cavernous easy-chair, always shabby but now almost disreputable, for the possession of which they had sometimes struggled years before. It was almost impossible to believe that ten years had passed since they had last seen it all. The appeal of inanimate things was never stronger. They stood together at the window, looked into each other's eyes, and laughed for pleasure.

Hugh's happiness was not without alloy. "If it could only last!" he said.

"We won't look forward," said Anne. "We will enjoy every hour of it while it does last. I would have made the long journey for only an hour of this." And she laughed again, looking out of the window to where her husband and her little child were standing on the lawn by the water.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE ANNE

"I THINK, you know, Uncle Hugh, that you and I are like the old people, and mother and father are the children."

Hugh and little Anne were sitting in the old chair in the schoolroom, with the window open and the curtains moving gently in a light June breeze. They often sat together like this and talked quite gravely about many things. He could never tell her enough about her mother's girlhood, and she pressed for the smallest details. What was she wearing when they did this or that? Was it before she put her hair up, or after? Did she run when they went down to the lake together, or only walk? She had the same stories over and over again, and if he altered them, in however small a particular, she corrected him. She would tell him about her life in Australia, showing the same meticulous accuracy as to details as she demanded from him. "It is all so different, and you have never been there," she said once. "But you seem to know all about it, Uncle Hugh."

"You see, I was quite alone," said Hugh, "and of course I thought a great deal about the people I loved, and liked to hear what they were doing."

"We talked a great deal about you too, mother and

I," said little Anne, "and often wished you were there."

The child would sit on his knee, nestling up to him. She was not demonstrative, neither was he. He never devoured her little face with kisses, as her father did a hundred times a day; but they were always satisfied with one another's company and were together for hours like old and tried friends. She had inherited her mother's sweetness of disposition, but was without her gaiety and restlessness of mind. Sometimes her father tried to romp with her, thinking it was unnatural that she should be so grave and quiet. She entered into his mood as far as she could, and without impatience, but when he left off playing with her she went back to her book or her long, intimate confidences. Hugh's subdued but never-failing sympathy with her quaint thoughts, and his quiet way of bearing her company, drew them more and more together.

Anne, during those early days at Foyle, seemed to throw off her years of motherhood. She was a happy girl again, and ran laughing and singing through the rooms of the old house and the beautiful gardens, as if no time had passed since she had left them. But it was with her husband she laughed and played, and not with her brother. To George Blomfield, Foyle was as much a place of happy memories as to her or Hugh. Very often he and Anne were together long hours of the day, while Hugh and little Anne talked quietly apart.

Kynaston and his wife came down for a few days.

Kynaston, after a glance round at the situation in which he found himself, and a few minutes in the company of his host and hostess, threw off the weight of his struggles against poverty which, owing to the concurrent growth of his business and his family, remained about the same as it had always been, and became a merry-hearted boy again. It was necessary to his enjoyment that his wife should share it in equal proportion, and she did so, in a rather more subdued fashion. With arms entwined they stood before Hugh on the lawn, waiting to be summoned to dinner, and told him they had never been in so delightful a place, nor met so entirely agreeable people as his sister and brother-in-law.

Hugh went up with Anne after dinner to look at the child sleeping, as his custom was. Standing by her little bed, with the night-light flickering dimly on walls and ceiling, Anne put her hand on his shoulder and said in a whisper: "Hugh, I thought you were to tell me everything about yourself in your letters?"

"I have done so," said Hugh.

"Not about your goodness to those nice people. You don't know how gratefully they talk about you. They say they owe everything to you."

Hugh turned away awkwardly. "I invested some money, which is bringing in a very good return," he said. "That was all."

"Dear Hugh, I love you for it all," she said, "and for all your goodness and sweetness to little Anne. I always used to lead you in the old days, didn't I? But

I look up to you now as ever so much wiser and better than I am."

Hugh smiled at her. "Better than you, my dear?" he said. "You must not upset all my ideas, Anne."

She put her arm through his and they went out of the room together, closing the door softly behind them.

"I wish you could be happy as George and I are," she said, "and those two dear cheerful people. I wish you could have children of your own; you would love them dearly."

"I shouldn't love them more than I love little Anne," he said.

The long June days passed away. The hay was cut and carried, the roses bloomed. The Kynastons went, and a few other guests came and went too. They amused themselves about the house and garden, and rode and drove over the country, sailed at Lydmouth, and were merry and light-hearted, or merely content, as their several natures impelled them to be. There was hardly ever a cloud in the sky, and the long days were filled with out-of-door occupations. "Except the year we were married," said George, "this is the best holiday I have ever had in my life," and he enjoyed every hour of it. "If I'm rich enough in twenty years' time," he said again, "I'll buy Foyle, and Anne and I will come and end our days here. There is no place like it."

George and Anne talked together one night, when they had been at Foyle for rather more than a fortnight, and Hugh's time with them was coming to an end.

"I wish he could have stayed with us for the whole summer," Anne said.

"He will come down every week-end," said George. "Poor chap, it must be devilish dull for him alone in those stuffy rooms."

"He is nearly always alone. I wish he had come out to us when father died. He would have been happier, I believe."

"He's an obstinate beggar. Old Dunster couldn't move him."

"Mr. Kynaston says he is wonderfully good at the work he has to do: he has got on faster than anybody else in the office."

"I don't blame him for sticking to it, but, by Jove, what a life! I would rather hump my swag in the Bush than get rich over his job."

"But Hugh isn't like you, George. He knew we should be very glad to have him with us, but he knew, too, the life in the Bush wouldn't have suited him. I respect him for making up his mind as he did."

"People seem to think that work on a big station means nothing but riding about on a horse and sleeping under a gum-tree. I wish it did. There's a good deal more office work than I care for, and he could just as well have done some of that. I should like to have him there. Can't you get him to come back with us?"

"I wonder if he would, George. Oh, I should be so glad!"

"So should I. We'd cheer him up. I hate to see a fellow of his age looking like an old man."

"Poor, dear Hugh! He has a fine character, George. Look how the Kynastons spoke of him. And he wasn't meant to live the dull lonely life he lives now. See how sweet he is with little Anne! He is different altogether from what he was when we first came home."

"I don't know about that. He doesn't eat much, and he says he doesn't sleep well."

"I know he is not very well just now. I mean that he is different in mind. He has lost that sad anxious look."

"He must be doing very well, now. Of course I couldn't give him anything like what he is making here. And he'll go further still, from what Kynaston told me. Perhaps it's a pity to persuade him to give it up."

"I will see what he says, at any rate. I should love to have him with us; and I don't know what little Anne will do if we go away and leave her dear uncle behind."

Anne talked to Hugh the next afternoon. They sat in the old log hut on the island, looking over the water and the lawn towards the house. She had no need to press him. Directly she mentioned her wish he said: "Do you and George still want me, Anne?"

"Oh, Hugh!" she answered, "we want you more than ever. It will be dreadful to go back and leave you behind."

"Well," he said, "I have been thinking over it. I am very tired of my life here, and, after being with

you again, I don't think I could stand going back to my old ways. It might be ten years before you came over again, and little Anne would be grown up."

"Come back with us, Hugh. I don't know what little Anne would do without you now. You ought to have been with us all these years."

"I don't think that. But things are different now. I have made my own way. I have saved some money and should not be dependent. And, from what George has told me of his occupations, there might be some work I could do."

"Oh yes; he said so last night. Hugh, you will come, won't you?"

"I am a cautious fellow, you know, Anne. I must think things over very carefully."

"But, dear Hugh, what is there to think over? We shall be so happy all together: George and you and I and little Anne. I am sure you can't be happy in London, all alone."

"I am rather afraid of happiness. I have had it before me once or twice in my life, and it has come suddenly to an end."

"Oh! I know, Hugh. And you are so young still. But you would be happy with us, wouldn't you? And we should so love to have you—until you married and had a home of your own."

"I shouldn't want to marry, Anne. That is what will make it possible for me to come to you, if I do decide to come. I shall be able to make my own living, and that is all I want. I will talk to George and see

what he suggests in the way of work. I want to come back with you, but I can't quite make up my mind. Something seems to be pulling me back."

"You are not very well, Hugh. You must not go back to London till I get you quite right. There is nobody to look after you there. You don't see things in their right colours when you are out of health. There is nothing to hold you back. Talk to George and settle everything tonight. I believe when you have made up your mind you will wonder why you ever hesitated. And you will give up your work in London at once, won't you? Then you can be here with us till we sail, and I will look after you."

He looked at her affectionately. "The same dear adventurous kind-hearted girl as ever!" he said. "I don't think I shall want much looking after. Your extravagant housekeeping has upset me a trifle. That is all."

He talked to George that evening after dinner. It was a lovely night, warm and still. The dining-room window was open and the moths flitted round the candles on the dinner-table. George expressed himself with the heartiest good-will. "I will find you plenty of work," he said. "You can put out of your mind once for all any idea of living on us. A man with your training will be of the greatest possible use. By Jove! won't old Dunster be pleased! And Anne and the kiddy too. Let's go and tell her."

They went out on the terrace, where Anne was sitting, and talked over their plans until late at night,

picturing the life they would lead together in the far-off land under the Southern Cross, wandering far in spirit from English Foyle, lying white and still behind them in the light of the moon.

They went together up to the room where the child was sleeping in her little white bed. "She will be so happy when we tell her," whispered Anne, shading the light from her darling's face. Hugh bent down and kissed her softly on the cheek. She stirred in her sleep and whispered "Good-night."

Hugh went to bed light at heart, but feeling strangely tired and ill, in spite of his happy thoughts. The next day he was lying in his room stricken down with typhoid fever. Foyle Manor, for all its memories and its smiling face, had played them false, and he lay between life and death for many weeks.

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Struggling back feebly to health and reason after long dark days, Hugh became aware of the constant presence of his sister. Hovering on the borderland between the unrealities projected by a mind striving to regain its balance, and the soothing influence of convalescence, he had constantly mistaken her for the little child, her namesake. She was so quiet, so unlike the Anne of old days, and when at last he regained full consciousness, and saw her thin pale face, with the dark eyes full of pain and trouble, a sense of agonizing loss pierced him, even through the apathy of his weakness. She kissed him gently and hid her face. "Little Anne," he whispered, surprised to find himself so weak that he

could hardly articulate. Then she turned away from him and went out of the room.

They could not keep the news from him for long. The grass was already growing over the grave of little Anne, his friend, in the green churchyard of Foyle.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHURTONS

On a cold dark day in November, Hugh stood on the quayside and watched his sister and her husband slowly moving away from him in the big ship which was to take them back to Australia. He kept his eyes fixed on his sister, a sad figure in black, crying unrestrainedly, as the great steamer was warped slowly out into mid-stream. Then when he could see her no longer he turned and went back to his dreary rooms, too sick at heart to care what became of him, or whether he lived or died, while Anne and her husband, fortunate at least in one another's love, were steaming south, to make the best of a childless home.

Hugh went back to his work in the Insurance office, living desolately through days and months, each as dull and dreary as the last. When his recovery had been assured, his brother-in-law had reopened the subject of his future plans, and pressed him still to go out to Australia with them.

"I can't do it, George," he had said, and would not let himself be persuaded. Anne, in the numbness of her own grief, had not been able to rouse herself to combat his resolution, and they sailed away without him. Poor, loving, light-hearted Anne, so cruelly bereft; he never saw her again.

Such utter desolation as Hugh felt for months after this second downfall of all his hopes could not last for ever. Time and the common round of daily duties slowly healed the wound, and his life went on much as before—the monotonous days bringing him neither good nor evil. He thought constantly of the dead child. He carried a picture of her about with him, and looked at it when he was alone. A photograph of her and her mother, which had been on his mantelpiece for two or three years, he put away in a drawer of his writing-table, which he locked. Twice a year he went down to Foyle and visited her grave—once at Christmas time, when it was cold and bare, and again at Easter, when flowers were growing about it. His grief for her loss presently merged into a yearning for the love of home and children. The subdued sense of loneliness with which he had lived during the first ten years of his manhood was sharpened into a definite longing. When the pain of his bereavement had died down he was still unhappy. Outwardly his life was little changed. He did his tale of work and prospered in it. He read more than ever. After little Anne's death he did not touch his painting for a year. Then when he went to Switzerland in August he took it up once more, and gained some pleasure from it.

The only people in England whom he could call his friends were the Kynastons. He went often to their house in Camden Town. It was a poor house, shabby and crowded. Both Kynaston and his wife worked hard, but poverty was always treading on their heels.

They faced the world with gallant hearts. Their children brought them plenty of anxiety but still more happiness. Hugh often envied his friend as he went back at night through the noisy streets to his own quiet and comfortable rooms. He thought sometimes that if he himself were to marry and beget children to cling round him, to comfort his heart, his life might yet be saved from the dreariness which he saw stretching in front of him through a long succession of years. But his income, though more than sufficient for his own needs, was not large, and he knew that he lacked the pluck and spring of mind with which his friend faced the constant pressure of poverty. Besides, his acquaintances were so few, and among them all he knew of no girl or woman whom he could picture to himself as sharing his life.

Five years went by in dull monotony, broken only by the additional sorrow brought by the news of his sister's death in the far-off country where she had made her home. Hugh thought of her as rejoining her children, and would gladly have given up the remaining years of his own cheerless life to be at peace, as Anne was. Somehow, ever since he had stood on the wet quay and seen her moving away from him, he had felt that the break in the cords which had bound them together was final. The bitterness of parting had been met then, and his grief at Anne's death was more for the sake of George, her husband, than for his own.

One late September, three or four years after Anne's death, Hugh was staying in an hotel on the coast of

Yorkshire. He had put off his main holiday until Christmas time, when he was going to Rome, and had come here for a week's rest. The hotel had been a country house of moderate size, which had been enlarged by the addition of a larger barracklike structure. It stood on the summit of a cliff six or seven hundred feet above the level of the sea, and from its windows could be seen a noble stretch of country—dark moorland, intersected by hillside farms and cottages and little patches of cultivated ground, while the great sweep of a bay rimmed it, ending in another steep cliff, in a cleft of which, four miles across the sea, nestled an old red-roofed fishing village, crowned by a stone-built church. The air was strong and keen. The house, assailed by fierce winds, sometimes wrapped in clouds when elsewhere the sky was blue, sometimes standing in sunshine above the sea of vapour, had once been remote and unknown in a wild country. Then a single line of railway, skirting the coastline, had made it accessible from the great watering-place twelve miles away. The little hamlet had been seized upon for development. The big hotel had sprung up gourd-like; streets had been marked out round the railway station, and a few houses built, looking strangely out of place among the loose stone walls, the rough roads and the bare fields; and there the change had been stayed. Glorious as it was on still days of summer and autumn, with the air pure and fresh from blowing over miles of heather and miles of sea, this bleak upland, on which no tree could grow

straight, except in the sheltered hollows, seemed to resent capture by man's enterprise. The new houses looked ashamed of their newness, the older part of the hotel, grey and lichened, beaten upon by years of wind and rain, as if the building which had been joined on to it were a monstrosity to which it could never accustom itself. During two months in the summer it was full to overflowing. For the rest of the year it stood empty, new and old alike patiently opposing themselves to the wild spirit of the place.

On a ledge of the cliff, below the level of the house, and approached by steps cut in the rock, had been made many years before a terraced garden of considerable extent. Thousands of pounds had been lavished on this costly freak, and but little had been done in the way of cultivation. But the years had made it beautiful. They had aged the crenellated battlements, and the tide of vegetation had flung itself against the rocks, the piled-up stone walls, and the rough-hewn stairs and passage ways, and framed the grass and the paths and the flower beds in a natural setting. You could stand in shelter on a pavement of great time-worn blocks of stone and look down across tumbled rocks interspersed with spaces of green rabbit-eaten turf and tangles of gorse, to where the sea lay far below. Gulls floated to and fro, uttering their mournful cry, sometimes on a level with the cliff top, sometimes beneath you. The height was so great that sheep feeding on the lower coombes were dwarfed to white maggots, and breakers among the great rocks on the

shore looked like ripples on a pebbled beach. The cliffs rose high to the right, and sea-birds sunned themselves on inaccessible ledges. To the left was the great sweep of the bay and the rolling moors climbing to still higher ridges.

To this beautiful place Hugh came on a golden evening in late September. He had the great hotel nearly to himself. It had been crowded a fortnight before, but a week of storm and fierce gale had emptied it, and it would close its doors for the winter very shortly. He took long walks over the moors, along the cliffside and by the sea, or sat in the terraced garden watching the sea and the gulls, reading and painting. He was refreshed and invigorated, and his life seemed to him less gloomy than it was wont.

There were two people among the few in the hotel, a lady and her daughter, who had arrived the day after himself. Mrs. Churton was a woman of middle-age, tall and upright, rather colourless, both in mind and feature, whose tendency was to consider herself superior to any company into which she might be thrown. Her daughter, Mabilia, was a younger replica of her, not in her first youth. Her eyes were slightly hard, her features correct. She was always carefully dressed and her hair neatly braided. Hugh felt no desire to make the acquaintance of either of them, and for the first evening of their arrival they kept to themselves and surveyed the people around them coldly.

On the second evening Hugh sat next to Mrs. Chur-

ton at dinner. She did not address herself to him, but the intimate conversation which she carried on with her daughter seemed designed to reach his ears and those of the other visitors. Mrs. Churton could not imagine what had induced her to go to Scarborough for the fortnight during which they were at a loose end. It was an utterly odious place. It was fortunate that they had been told of this hotel. The air was good, and though the accommodation was not what she could have wished it would do very well for a week. After that, it appeared, they were going to pay visits in the country, until it should be time to settle in London again for the winter. She mentioned the names of the people to whose houses they were going; one of their hosts rejoiced in a title, and Mrs. Churton seemed to rejoice in it too, though she did not intend to convey that impression, for she said that it was very tiresome that they should have to go there at all. As Hugh went up to bed that night she was asking the manageress about the guests in the hotel, and he heard his own name mentioned.

The next morning he set out for a long walk across the moors, and did not return until the afternoon. Then he took a book and went down on the terrace to read for an hour. He settled himself in an embrasure of the low turreted wall, and looked out across the sea. His book lay unopened on the stone seat beside him, and he let his thoughts wander far away. The white gulls floated beneath him, calling sadly; the level rays of the sun threw long shadows; the sea mur-

mured softly far below. His long walk had tired him, but he felt well, and not unhappy, as the past years came up before him and assailed him with gentle thoughts of those whom he had loved and lost. Youth had passed him by, and he had missed the best in life, but the fair scenes of nature still had power to charm him. He would never quite lack consolation so long as he had eyes to see the beauty of the world and ears to listen to its quieter cadences.

He was aroused from his reverie by the clang of an iron gate, by voices, and footsteps on the gravel. Mrs. and Miss Churton came down through the garden and up on to the stone platform where he was sitting. It ran some twenty or thirty yards along by the low wall, and they began to walk up and down it. He was mildly annoyed at the disturbance of his privacy, but did not expect that they would do more than pass him by without recognition. He was somewhat surprised when Mrs. Churton bowed to him as they passed, and when they had gone the length of the terrace and back again she stopped and entered into polite conversation with him. He stood up beside her. "My daughter," she said, and Hugh acknowledged the unnecessary introduction.

When she had made a few remarks upon the weather and the beauty of the scene around them, Mrs. Churton disclosed the purpose with which she had addressed him. This was to invite him to a defensive alliance against the other people staying in the hotel. "It is so disagreeable," she said, "to be obliged to mix up with

these provincial business people. They spoil everything."

Hugh looked at her wonderingly. "They seem quite inoffensive," he said.

"Yes; but their accent!" returned Mrs. Churton. "It sets one's teeth on edge. I said to my daughter last night that it was odd that in a big hotel like this there should be only one gentleman with whom we could associate."

The remark was addressed so pointedly to him that he bowed, still wondering. A faint flush appeared on Mabilia Churton's thin cheeks. "Everybody here seems quite respectable, mother," she said, "and they do not interfere with us."

"My dear," said Mrs. Churton, "they are hopeless vulgarians. I saw your name in the visitors' book, Mr. Lelacheur. Where was it that we met Sir Richard and Lady Lelacheur, Mabilia?"

"At Homburg," replied Miss Churton rather shortly. "At least, they were staying there at the same time as we were."

"Ah! that was it. I was thinking that we met them at some country house. It is not a common name, I suppose?"

"Sir Richard Lelacheur is my cousin," said Hugh, as she paused for a reply. "But I have never met him."

Mrs. Churton seemed a little disconcerted. There was a short pause, and then she went over again the information as to her future movements which Hugh

had heard the night before at dinner. "How long do you intend to stay here?" she asked.

Hugh told her that at the end of the week he was going back to his work in London.

Again she seemed a trifle put out, and there was another pause in the conversation, which Hugh did nothing to fill. "Well, we shall be able to talk to one another after dinner," she said graciously. "I think I will go in, Mabilia, it is getting cold. But do not let me drag you in if you would rather be out of doors."

But Mabilia preferred to go in with her mother, and with stately bows they left Hugh again to himself.

He talked to Miss Churton at dinner that evening, and afterwards in the drawing-room. She was less commanding in conversation than her mother, and made no attempt to penetrate his reserve about himself. She had read a good deal, and talked of what she had read, not with any particular insight, but with enough intelligence to interest Hugh, who seldom had an opportunity of discussing books. It appeared also that she painted a little, and when Hugh confessed that he did so too Mrs. Churton struck in and suggested that they should make a sketching excursion together. "I do nothing of that sort myself," she said loftily, "but I can sit and read a book while you are both at work."

Hugh was rather surprised the next morning to find himself setting out for the lower coombes alone with Mabilia Churton. Mrs. Churton had a slight cold and would not appear until lunchtime. So Mabilia informed him, in a manner which seemed to imply some

relief. She did not suggest a postponement of the expedition, and they went down the steep hillside together. "It was perfectly ridiculous of mother to have thought of coming," she said: "she would not have sat still for ten minutes, and we should not have done anything."

"I hope her cold is not serious," said Hugh.

"Oh no, I don't think so," she replied indifferently.

They settled themselves under the shelter of a rock and prepared their apparatus. "May I look at your book?" asked Miss Churton. Hugh handed her his sketch-book diffidently, and she turned over the pages. "Oh! but these are excellent," she said. "I shall be quite ashamed to show you mine." Whether or no she expected to be asked to do so, Hugh did not make the request. "These are all foreign," she said, when she had looked through them. "You have travelled a good deal, Mr. Lelacheur."

"I usually go abroad every year," Hugh replied.

"I am very fond of the English country. We were staying at a beautiful place in Sussex last year. I should like to show you. But I could not get anything right. It was beyond me."

She took up her own sketch-book and showed him the picture of a large house in a large garden. Hugh looked at it gravely. He could find nothing to praise in the hard outlines of a building with innumerable windows and chimneys, or the garish colours of beds of geraniums and calceolarias. "It is not a very good subject," he said.

"No," she agreed; "but I wanted to have a picture

of the house. It is a fine place. It belongs to some great friends of ours."

Hugh did not ask the name of the owners, but turned a leaf. "Don't look at any more," she said, and took the book from him. "They are not good enough; but it amuses me to try."

They both set to work, and painted for a couple of hours, with only short snatches of conversation, and those chiefly on technical details. The high cliff was in front of them, partly in sunshine, partly in purple shadow, and the sea to the left. Hugh washed in his colours with a practised hand, Miss Churton stippled them weakly. She showed no illusions as to her own lack of skill, but admired his work generously. Presently she laid aside her book altogether and watched him finish his drawing. "I think you ought to succeed in anything you take up," she said. "You have strength and decision."

Hugh held his brush poised for a moment. "They are very good qualities in drawing," he said; "I hope you may be right."

She cast a glance at his face, half furtive, half curious, and then rose from the ground. "I think we ought to be getting back," she said.

They made their way along the cropped grass between the rocks and the gorse, and climbed the steep hillside. They talked about the places they had seen abroad and in England. Miss Churton's chief interest was in those places in which she had stayed as a guest, and when Hugh mentioned some country renowned for

its beauty she would say: "Do you know the So-and-Sos? I believe they live thereabouts."

"I know very few people," he said at last. "I have always lived much alone."

"Were you brought up in London?" she asked.

"I have lived in London for a long time," he replied.

She told him something of the course of her own life. Her father had been in the army, and had died before she was born. She and her mother had always lived in the same house in the Cromwell Road, but they had been about a good deal. She had been to school at Eastbourne. Her father's family came from Kent, but their place had been sold. Her mother's people lived in Staffordshire, but they saw very little of them. They had a great many friends in London, but no relations. Hugh accepted these disclosures courteously, but without putting questions which would elucidate them further, and without making any disclosures in return.

They reached the hotel about luncheon-time. Mrs. Churton had apparently thrown off her indisposition, and met them in the hall. Hugh inquired after her health and, having been reassured on the point, went up to his room. "I hope you have had a pleasant morning," said the elder lady, eyeing her daughter rather sharply.

"Oh yes," said Miss Churton indifferently. "Mr. Lelacheur is quite an artist."

"Who is he?" asked her mother. "Have you found out anything about him?"

"He is a gentleman," replied Mabilia. "I don't want to know any more than that."

"Don't be aggravating, Mabilia," said her mother. "Where does he come from? What does he do?"

"I really don't know, mother. He is not exactly effusive in giving information about himself."

"I hope he is all right. I wonder if he is really a cousin of Sir Richard Lelacheur's. So many people lay claim to relationships which they do not really possess."

"I am quite sure Mr. Lelacheur wouldn't."

"He said he was a cousin. A cousin may mean anything. However, it will be quite easy to find that out."

Mabilia turned away. "I like him," she said; "he is reserved, but he is interesting, not like other men."

That afternoon Hugh walked to the fishing village on the other side of the bay. Mrs. Churton had asked him his plans after luncheon, and, when he had told her of his intentions, had said: "That is a long walk, rather farther than I——" But her daughter had broken in: "You and I will go to the foot of the moor, mother, after we have rested a little."

He walked along the cliff top, had tea at a little inn overlooking the sea, and came back by the sands, climbing up the steep cliff path homewards in the dusk. He thought a good deal about the Churtons as he walked. It had very seldom happened to him that any woman had shown a desire for his society, but he could not be unaware that he would be a good deal

in their company as long as they stayed under the same roof. He was not quite sure whether he was annoyed or gratified. He did not like Mrs. Churton. Unsophisticated as he was, he could hardly help labelling her as impertinent and inquisitive. His knowledge of the world, curiously defective on certain points, did not teach him that his name and connection would be likely to prove attractive to such a woman as she, but he did realize that the questions she had already asked both directly and indirectly, about himself, would continue to be asked, and she would not be satisfied unless he told her much more of his history than he had any intention of telling her. Anne's name and that of her child were sacred to him. In his loneliness he had never spoken of them, not even to the Kynastons, and he would never do so, if he could help it, to Mrs. Churton.

His penetration did not show him any of these unpleasant qualities in Mabilia Churton. The few direct questions she had put to him in the morning had not been persisted in, and he had not recognized any other motive than one of companionship in the confidences which she had given him. He thought she was pleased to find some community of taste in a chance acquaintance, and he was inclined to reciprocate that pleasure. His life was not lived so consistently alone because he preferred solitude. He was incapable of taking the first step in an acquaintanceship, but, if it was offered to him, he had no impulse of rejection. It was pleasant to talk over the things that interested him to a well-educated woman. He thought of Mabilia Churton as

well educated, and she was refined in speech and manner. He rather hoped that it would be suggested that they should go sketching together again. It did not occur to him to suggest it himself.

It was dark when he reached the hotel. He read for an hour and then went down to dinner. His place was next to Miss Churton, and he talked to her and her mother afterwards until they retired for the night.

CHAPTER XIV

MABILIA

Hugh was walking with Mabilia Churton across the heather. Mrs. Churton had accompanied them to where the road on the crest of a high hill was crossed by another, and continuing, lost itself immediately in a moorland track. There was a great stone windmill here and a little inn. To the south a wide prospect of hill and valley opened out, edged by the rugged coastline; to the north and the west rolled a great expanse of moor, brown and sullen under a lowering sky. The wind tore across it from the north-east, bringing spurts of rain, and every now and again a gleam of sunshine which brightened the dark undulations. She watched the two figures dipping into the hollows and rising again to the ridges until they were moving specks in the vast solitude of the moor, and then turned and went down the hill to the comfort of her fire.

Hugh and Mabilia had been together a good deal during the past week. As long as the mellow September sunshine had continued they had made sketching excursions, and since the break in the weather they had taken long walks over the windy heath, along the sands and on the rough hilly roads. Their conversation, during these expeditions, was intermittent. Hugh had told his companion nothing, as yet, of his past life, and

she had ceased trying to draw confidences from him. She seemed to have fallen into his own reticent mood, was content to draw or to walk for a long time together without speaking, and seldom now talked of the details of her own life. But every now and then she would cast at him a look which showed that her thoughts were busy with him during the silence, and that it was not for lack of desire to know that she refrained from seeking to pierce the shell of his reserve. Mrs. Churton's reticence had been far less admirable, but he had received her fishing conversation with a grave courtesy, mixed now with some wonderment that she should persist in it, which made it plain that her curiosity was divined, and that it was not his intention to satisfy it.

They had walked nearly a mile across the moor before either of them spoke. Then Hugh broke the silence with a premonitory cough. "Miss Churton," he said, "we have been together a good deal during the last few days. You have been very kind in taking me as I am but, if you care to hear it, I should like to tell you something of my early life."

A blush had mounted Mabilia's thin cheeks at his first words. "Don't tell me anything you don't wish to," she said hurriedly; "I am quite content that we should be friends as we are now."

"I live so little in the world," he said, "and see so few people, that it did not occur to me, at first, that perhaps I owed it to Mrs. Churton to——"

"Oh! I know what you mean," she broke in; "mother is like that. She wants to know all about

everybody—what they do and who their relations are. I have seen that it has surprised you. But *I* haven't worried you with questions, have I? *I* haven't tried to find out your secrets."

"I have no secrets," he replied, with a smile. "I suppose a lonely man is apt to keep things to himself that other people might talk about. I have had losses which it is difficult for me to speak of. But I will tell you about them."

She did not seek to dissuade him further, and he told her the tale of his life, baldly. "My father and his brother, Sir Simeon Lelacheur, whose son you and Mrs. Churton have met, were not friends," he said. "My father was a sailor, and when he retired from the service we lived in the country—in Dorsetshire—he and my sister and I. She married and went to live in Australia. I was about eighteen then. A few months later my father lost his money and soon after that he died. I had to go and work in the City, and I have worked there ever since. My sister and her husband and—and her child, came over some years ago, and we went down together to our old home. It was arranged that I should go back to Australia with them. They were my only relations, and I had very few friends. Then I fell ill, and—and the little child fell ill too—it was typhoid fever. I got better, but she died. They went back without me, and after a few years my sister died too. That is all my story, Miss Churton. It is simply this—that I have lived alone, and lost all of those whom I loved."

Miss Churton's eyes were bent, her face was serious. "I am very sorry," she said, in a low voice.

They reached home as the dusk was falling, and Mabilia went up to Mrs. Churton's room. "Mother," she said, "he has told me about himself."

Mrs. Churton was reclining in an easy-chair before a bright fire. She laid aside her book and looked up. "Well, and I think about time too," she said. "And what is the profound secret that he has been hugging so closely?"

"There is no secret. He has had a sad life. His father was in the navy, and——"

"That I could have told you. I have just had a letter from Mrs. Moxon-Jones. I asked her to look up the family in a *Peerage*. Admiral Lelacheur was a brother of Sir Simeon, the father of the present man. This is his only son, but Sir Richard has four boys, so there is practically no chance of his succeeding. However, the baronetcy is an old one. There was a daughter who married, and died a few years ago in Australia. That is my news. Now what is yours?"

"That is mine too, except that Mr. Lelacheur's sister had a child, who died as well. From the way he spoke, I think he was devoted to both of them and has never got over their loss."

"Well; but you must have found out something else. Why does he not know his cousins? He is the next heir, if anything happened to them."

"His father and Sir Simeon quarrelled about something. He did not tell me what it was."

"Well, but—I suppose his father must have been well off—a retired Admiral. He is the only son."

"His father lost his money, and Mr. Lelacheur had to go into the City. He has lived alone always. He scarcely sees any one. Oh, mother, I am so sorry for him."

"So am I," said Mrs. Churton, after a pause, reflectively. "Of course, that might account for his secrecy, though, upon my word, I can't see what he had to hide. It was impossible to get the least little thing out of him."

"I wish you would leave off trying, mother," said Mabilia, with some asperity. "I have never met a man I liked so much, and if he did not feel that I was his friend he would never have told me so much as he has. I should think it was easy enough to see that he cares nothing about knowing a lot of people, and the sort of thing that we think so much about. You can't impress him in that way, however much you try."

"I am quite at a loss to know what you mean, Mabilia," said Mrs. Churton stiffly. "Who has been trying to impress him, pray?"

Mabilia made an impatient movement. "I think we understand each other pretty well, mother," she said. "We are nobodies in particular, but we like to appear somebodies. I can assure you that Mr. Lelacheur doesn't care in the least who we are. If I am to keep him as a friend—and I mean to if I can—you had better drop all that. He knows nothing of the sort of life

or the sort of people that we are interested in, and he doesn't want to in the least. Let me make a friend for once for the sake of what he is. You will only spoil our friendship if you go on talking about relations he has never known, and you don't know either."

"Really, Mabilia," returned Mrs. Churton, scandalized, "you seem to want to make me out an arrant snob."

Mabilia went out of the room without replying. Her mother remained by herself some time longer. When she met Hugh that evening her conversation underwent a change. She talked of the books she had been reading, not altogether without intelligence, and about places, but very little about people, and Hugh found himself more at ease in her presence than before. Mabilia talked very little, but Hugh's sense of intimacy with her was sensibly increased.

The next day all three of them left, and Hugh travelled with Mrs. and Miss Churton as far as York, and, before taking leave, promised to call on them when they returned to town in November. He sank back in his seat with a slight sigh of relief when the train moved off again. It was pleasant to be alone again.

The fine air and the exercise he had taken had done him good. In the weeks that followed he looked back with some gratification to his short autumn holiday, and recalled the romantic scenery in which it had been passed. It was natural that Mabilia Churton should be connected in some measure with his agreeable recollections, for she had been his companion and had shared

his appreciation of that beautiful country. He did not hear from her or her mother until they returned to London towards the end of November. Then he received a note asking him to dinner, and accepted with some mild degree of pleasurable anticipation.

Mrs. Churton's drawing-room was what would have been described in a house agent's catalogue as handsomely furnished. The curtains were of expensive material, the carpet was thick and soft, there was a great deal of gilding about the walls and the furniture, there was a grand piano and a large glass cabinet full of modern china and pottery. Hugh, punctual to the hour named, waited here for some little time. He looked round him with some curiosity, but found nothing to please his eye. The water-colours on the walls were of little value; there were no bookshelves, but on a small table a few novels from the library, and some ladies' papers. A light wallpaper, indeterminate in hue, gave the room a cold appearance in spite of its lavish ornamentation. He felt slightly depressed.

Presently Mabilia came in. She was dressed in black, which showed up her fair but rather thin neck and shoulders and her upright figure to some advantage. There was a slight flush on her usually pale cheeks as she shook hands with him, and her cold eyes were rather bright. Mrs. Churton came in when they had spoken a few words of greeting. She was rather more elaborately dressed than her daughter, and her manner was also rather more elaborate, but there was some genuine warmth in her greeting, and Hugh had the

gratification of feeling that both ladies were pleased to see him again.

The dining-room was massively furnished, and had an air of comfort which the drawing-room lacked. The dinner was passable, but longer than Hugh was accustomed to. They were waited upon by two maids. They talked of the week in Yorkshire which they had spent together, and of the houses at which Mrs. Churton and Miss Churton had since visited. Mrs. Churton had recovered some of her usual rather bombastical manner, but she no longer invited Hugh to cap her list of acquaintances, and Mabilia spoke chiefly of the places they had seen and not of the people. As Hugh walked home, soon after ten o'clock, he compared in his mind the manner of mother and daughter. He thought Mrs. Churton's habit of dragging in the names of her titled acquaintances upon all occasions detestable. He had never before met a woman who did that, but her vainglory was so obvious that he could hardly mistake her intention. He thought he could see that Mabilia found this habit odious too, and was ashamed of it. The idea caused him some discomfort, but it inclined him to respect her the more.

During the next month he was a frequent visitor at the house in the Cromwell Road, and began to feel at home there. His liking for Mrs. Churton hardly increased, but he was able to make allowances for her disagreeable qualities, and found that they were, to a certain extent, balanced by good ones. It surprised him to find that she and Mabilia spent an evening a

week at a girls' club in a poor part of Notting Hill, and that nothing was allowed to interfere with this engagement. He accompanied them there one evening. Mrs. Churton was a different woman immediately she entered the close brightly lit club-room. The girls thronged round her. She spoke to them authoritatively but kindly. The tricks of speech which she kept for her more well-to-do friends had disappeared. She was straightforward and sympathetic. She had a dozen girls round her to one who sought the ear of her daughter. Hugh was little at his ease, and Mabilia, shaking off the girls around her, spoke to him aside. "I hate all this sort of thing," she confessed. "I only do it out of duty." Hugh felt suddenly depressed. Mrs. Churton was busy organizing a game which should take in the whole assembly, and called to Mabilia and Hugh to help her.

At home Mabilia's manner pleased him much better than her mother's. He met a good many people at their house, some of whom he liked. But the majority —of the women, at least—showed the same tastes and inclinations as their hostess, and he had some difficulty in warding off their personal interest in himself and his position. Mabilia guarded him against the more persistent of them. She allowed him to know that she thought them impertinent. "I think it is odious," she said to him once, "that people should make such a fuss about things that don't matter in the least. None of these women care for what you are; it is only who you are that interests them." Hugh thought that this

was very well said. Mabilia Churton, at any rate, saw through the shams of her mother's world, and disliked them.

Just before Christmas Hugh went to Rome. Once again he was relieved to be by himself. On looking back he realized that his friendship with the Churtons had occupied him to the exclusion of many of the former pursuits of his leisure. He had dined with them half-a-dozen times, had been with them several times to concerts and plays, and had called on them, either on Saturday or Sunday, every week since they had returned to London. In thinking it over he was not quite sure whether this constant intercourse had bettered his lonely life or disturbed it to its detriment. He was quite sure that a month's respite from it was grateful to him.

Towards the end of his stay in Rome he had a mild attack of influenza, from which he recovered sufficiently to enable him to make the journey home at the proper time. But, arrived once more in his rooms, he had a relapse, and had to keep to them for a week. A note to Mrs. Churton, in answer to an invitation awaiting his arrival, brought that lady herself to see him. She was the lady of the club again, sympathetic, capable, and unpretentious. She came twice while he was still in bed, brought him fruit and light literature, and left him feeling the better for her visits. When he left his bed she brought Mabilia, who looked round upon his possessions with curiosity, but showed by her manner that she was ill at ease in a sickroom and wished her-

self away. By the time he had completely recovered Hugh liked the mother better than the daughter.

During the next three months he was as much with them as before. One Saturday afternoon late in March he and Mabilia were at Kew, in the rock garden. "It is my ambition some day to have a cottage in the country with a large garden," Hugh told her. "I come here at all seasons of the year, and when I get my garden I shall know what to do with it."

"That is just what I should like too," she said. "But mother hates the country, except just to go and stay in a big house. I suppose I am doomed to live in London all my life." She spoke discontentedly, as she often did. "I would give anything to get out of it all," she said.

"You have a great many friends in London," said Hugh.

"What do I care about all those people?" she replied impatiently. "I shouldn't mind if I never saw any of them again."

Hugh did not answer, and for the rest of the afternoon Mabilia was more silent than her wont, and when they came to the door of the house in the Cromwell Road bade him good-bye without inviting him in.

It was after this that Hugh began to perceive a change in the attitude of both ladies towards him. He was not asked to the house so frequently, and when he called upon them their behaviour was less cordial, and even became slightly constrained. It was not until he perceived that this was so that he began to ask himself

what he had expected of his friendship with the Churtons. The answer was that he had expected nothing except its continuance, without change and without development. It would make little difference to his subdued appreciation of life whether it continued or ceased, but he had received kindness and hospitality from them to such an extent that it caused him some distress to feel that he was withholding any return that they might expect from him. It was not until he asked himself further what that return might be, that the truth flashed across his mind. A friendship between a man and an unmarried woman, according to the code of such people as the Churtons, could not proceed without development. It must lead to marriage, or at any rate a proposal of marriage.

It was the first time that the idea had entered his mind, but he had seen enough of the Churtons and their friends to guide him to the reflection that it had probably been in theirs almost from the beginning.

There was abundant food for thought here, and he thought long and closely, discovering many things both about himself and about them. Of any feeling towards Mabilia beyond a mild liking, founded partly upon propinquity, partly upon some community of taste, he had none, but reflection pointed to a probably warmer regard on her part. His ignorance of the world as she and her mother viewed it, although less abysmal than before he had known them, hid from him more than a hint of other reasons for their desiring the declaration which he was now pretty sure that they did desire.

He was not likely to divine the wish that a woman of Mabilia's age and upbringing might have for any marriage which would not be an obvious step downwards. He thought of himself, especially in view of the declaration she had made in the garden at Kew, as being able to offer her a life which she would prefer to that which she now lived—a simpler life, perhaps out of London, and certainly away from the people by whom she was now surrounded, and whom she had often told him that she despised. For arousing that hope in her, however unconsciously, he felt himself her debtor.

But what of himself? He was certainly not prepared to offer his future in payment of that debt unless it would add somewhat to his meagre stock of contentment. Life had brought him little happiness, but his solitude was something not to be exchanged lightly for a companionship which might prove irksome. If he did offer himself to Mabilia he would not do so under false pretences. There could be no declaration of love where no love existed. But it was possible that two of them together, both past their first youth, and asking no great gifts of life, might help each other to some increase of satisfaction in the years that remained to them.

His liking for Mabilia hung between unwillingness to withdraw altogether from her society, and uncertainty as to the wisdom of a closer tie; no man could ever have contemplated marriage from weaker compulsion. But there was one consideration that turned the scale. The thought of little children of his own

to twine themselves round his heartstrings aroused desire. This was the boon that marriage should bring to him. It was a compelling one. His heart warmed as he thought of it. He made his decision, and was relieved that the inward controversy was ended.

He wrote to Mabilia saying that he should call on the following afternoon, and asking that he might see her alone.

The next day was Saturday. He left his work at about two o'clock, went to his rooms and changed his clothes, and walked round to the house in the Cromwell Road. He stood on the steps for a moment after he had rung for admittance and looked up and down the respectable but rather gloomy street. The door was opened, and closed behind him.

Mabilia was sitting on the sofa, with a book in her hand. She sprang up nervously as he entered. "We haven't seen you for nearly a week," she said, as she shook hands with him.

"Miss Churton," said Hugh, "I have come to ask you if you will be my wife."

He stood before her, tall, slight, rather sad-eyed, and looked straight at her. She turned away in some confusion. "Let us sit down," she said.

It seemed to be for him to speak again, and he found it more difficult than he had imagined. "We have been friends for some time," he said. "I have very little, I am afraid, to offer you. But I will try and make you happy."

She met him much in the same mood as his own. She

smiled at him and said: "I thought you might be coming to say that, and I made up my mind to answer 'Yes.'"

He was accepted. And again the word was with him.

He took the hand which lay beside him on the sofa, and bent over it chivalrously. "I am a fortunate man," he said.

She looked at him again, a little sadly. "I hoped you might ask me, from the first," she said. "You haven't asked me because you saw that, have you?"

"I have asked you," he said, "because I have nearly always lived alone, and because, since I have known you, I want to be alone no longer."

Her voice was a little tremulous as she answered: "I have been very sorry for you. I will try and make up for the sadness of your life as far as I can."

"I am sure you will do that," he said. "I am not rich, but I can give you something of what you want, I think. There will be no need for us to live in London."

"Do you think we shall be able to live in the country?" she asked doubtfully.

"Not very far out, perhaps," he said. "But we can have a quiet little house, and a garden. You can have the friends you choose. There will be no need for you to live the life you are tired of here. And every year we can go away for three or four weeks, to any beautiful place we may fix on."

"I think," she said hurriedly, "we had better make no plans until you have talked to mother. But I will do anything you wish, of course."

CHAPTER XV

PLANS

Mrs. Churton sat at her writing-table in the room she called the library, and Hugh sat on the other side of the table in an easy-chair by the fire. The library was about fourteen feet square, and was behind the dining-room. It commanded a view of an ivy-covered wall which bounded a gravelled square, euphemistically termed "the garden." A plane-tree grew in one corner, and it was bordered by a couple of feet of soil, over which trailed the bare stalks of a Virginia creeper. The room had a dark wallpaper, dark curtains, and an old Turkey carpet. Mrs. Churton's writing-table occupied the middle of the floor. It was a large business-like-looking structure, and was kept in extreme order. A massive mahogany bookcase with glass doors contained a collection of books which were seldom disturbed. Over the mantelpiece was a proof engraving of the picture representing lions prowling about the moonlit Coliseum. Other engravings on the walls were Rosa Bonheur's "Horse Fair," "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers," "Two's Company Three's None," and a large portrait of Queen Victoria. On the mantelpiece were a clock set in a Greek temple of black marble and two equestrian bronze figures. The chairs were massive and rather shabby.

"I am very glad to hear this news," said Mrs. Churton decisively. "I have long seen that you were attracted by Mabilia, and it will do no harm now to say that she has long been attracted by you."

Hugh murmured acknowledgments.

"It will be necessary to go into business matters," she proceeded, leaning back in her chair and playing with an ivory paper-knife. "But that need not detain us long."

"My income is rather over five hundred a year," said Hugh, as it seemed to be expected of him that he should make a statement. "It will increase a little, but will probably never be much more than six hundred a year."

"It is very small," said Mrs. Churton uncompromisingly, "but fortunately I am well off. Mabilia will have nothing of her own until my death, but I shall be able to allow her something in the meantime."

"If you care to allow her enough to dress upon," said Hugh, "I will accept that on her behalf with gratitude. Otherwise we will live upon my income."

"Have you made any plans as to living?"

"Mabilia would like to live in the country. We shall not be able to do that for some years. But we could find a house in some pleasant suburb—Hampstead, or possibly a little farther out still."

Mrs. Churton held up her hands. "My dear Hugh," she said, "I cannot consent to that. It would be banishment. Mabilia would dislike it extremely, and it would not be fair to her."

Hugh's grave face became set. "I think you will find you are mistaken," he said quietly.

"I am quite sure I am not mistaken," replied Mrs. Churton. "Mabilia would consent to anything you required of her. That is only natural. But she would not be happy away from all her friends. She has been brought up as you see"—Mrs. Churton waved her hand to indicate the dun-coloured room—"and I could not consent to give you my only daughter if she were to be taken away from all the luxury and refinement to which she has been accustomed, and the—the friends of position among whom she moves, to be set down in a poky house in the suburbs to live on a few hundreds a year."

Hugh looked somewhat surprised at this outburst, and more than a little displeased. "May I ask what you suggest?" he said, with his brows bent.

"What I suggest is that you should both live here with me. For my own sake I do not want to lose my daughter, and I cannot see that it is necessary. I have more than enough for my own needs, and am quite willing—more than willing—to share it with you."

Hugh thought for a moment. "It is a generous proposal," he said, "but I am afraid I cannot accept it, Mrs. Churton. It would never occur to me to marry unless I could support my wife myself. If Mabilia is willing to share my life she will share it all. Five hundred a year is not poverty. She will miss very little that she has been accustomed to."

"Now, my dear Hugh," expostulated Mrs. Churton, "do listen to reason. I am not asking you to live here

as my pensioner. If you please you may share in the expenses of the house, although I do not wish it, and it is not necessary. You will have this room to yourself. I have thought it all over. I shall move all my things upstairs, and you may decorate and furnish it as you please. I should have liked to furnish it for you myself, as my wedding present, but I know you have your own things, and will prefer to have them. It will be entirely your own."

"You are very generous, Mrs. Churton, but I am not thinking entirely of myself."

"Wait a minute. Mabilia already has her own boudoir. You will both have your own quarters as much to yourselves as if I were not in the house. In the daytime when you are away at your work Mabilia will not be left alone. You ought to think of her, Hugh, and what she will gain by continuing to live here."

"I don't want to seem ungrateful for so much kindness, but, to speak plainly, I would rather live in my own house, even if it must be a small one. And I think Mabilia would certainly wish it too."

"Will you ask her then? But there is no need to settle anything in a hurry. We can talk it all over. Whatever is decided, my dear Hugh, I feel sure that you and Mabilia will be very happy together, and I am unfeignedly glad that this engagement has taken place." She rose from her table with a face that seemed to show her pleasure to be genuine. Hugh was slightly embarrassed by her warmth. "You are very kind," he

said awkwardly, and they went upstairs to the drawing-room, where Mabilia was sitting.

Hugh stayed to dinner that evening and afterwards talked to Mabilia alone. He told her of her mother's suggestion. "I could not say much to her," he said, with a smile, "but I knew that your wish was to get away from the kind of life which Mrs. Churton believes to be the only one you care to live. I knew that you would be happier, as I should, in a house of your own, even if it is not a very big one."

Mabilia looked down, plaiting a fold of her skirt. "I think if mother wishes it very much," she said, "we ought to consider her. She would be very lonely in this big house all by herself."

"I am thinking of you—of ourselves," replied Hugh, "not of your mother."

"But we must think of her a little, mustn't we? She has always had me with her. She would miss me terribly."

"Have you talked over this plan with Mrs. Churton?" Hugh asked her.

"How can I have talked over anything yet? She did just mention it, before dinner."

"Would you prefer to live here as she suggests?"

"Oh! Hugh, don't speak like that. You know I will do whatever you wish."

"But I want to speak of what *you* wish. Will you tell me definitely whether you would rather go on living here—the life you told me, often, you disliked—or that we should be together in our own house?"

"You know which I should prefer, for my own sake; but if it is a matter of duty——"

Then at last he understood. "I must think over it," he said quietly. "Now I think I will say good-night."

A sharp wind blew against him as he left the house. The long street looked dreary and confined, the rather pretentious porticoes on either side of it seemed to guard the entrance to dull houses with no hint of home about them, houses with heavy ugly furniture and no brightness or warmth. He looked up at the sky, in which a cold moon was riding half obscured by scudding clouds. His eye was caught by a row of windows high up in one of the houses, protected by white-painted iron bars. Behind them were nurseries, and little children sleeping in rooms faintly illumined. There were happy homes behind the dull fronts of the houses in the Cromwell Road.

He turned off into a narrow street and let himself into the house in which he lived. He turned up the gas in his sitting-room, sat down at his writing-table, unlocked a drawer and took from it the photograph of his sister and her child, and looked at it long and sadly.

Hugh told Mrs. Churton the next day that as she and Mabilia seemed to be in agreement on the point he would consent to occupy her house after his marriage. He spoke rather stiffly and not as if he were accepting a favour, and he insisted upon contributing the greater part of his income towards the expenses of the household.

"But, my dear Hugh," expostulated Mrs. Churton, "your living here will not cost me anything like four hundred a year. The house is my own, and it does not take much more than that to run it entirely."

"That is the only condition on which I can consent to live here," Hugh replied, and with a glance aside at him Mrs. Churton gave way.

It was settled that the wedding was to take place in the middle of July, when Hugh would have a month's holiday, which they were to spend honeymooning in Switzerland. It soon became apparent that the ceremony was to be made as elaborate as possible. From the first week it was talked about whenever Hugh was present, details were discussed fervently, both by Mrs. Churton and Mabilia, and there was a constant canvassing of people who were or were not to be invited. One evening Hugh was sitting in the room which was to become his own, in the company of Mrs. Churton. Mabila had left them alone together. Mrs. Churton, at her table with a sheet of paper and a pencil, said: "I should like to read you the provisional list of people we have decided on."

"Surely," replied Hugh, with some impatience, "there is no necessity to go into that now! We are still three months off the day."

"We cannot begin too early," said Mrs. Churton. "I am methodical, and like to have something to work on. Then we can add to it as names occur to us, and no one will be forgotten. My first names are Sir Thomas and Lady Ponder, Sir James and Lady——"

"I do not care to hear them, Mrs. Churton," Hugh interrupted. "I can safely leave all that to you."

"Very well," said Mrs. Churton. "I have the list of our friends, which can be added to. But I may as well begin to put down those whom you wish to be invited."

"You might ask Mr. and Mrs. Kynaston, if you please," said Hugh. "I have no other friends in England."

Mrs. Churton leaned back in her chair and tapped the table with her pencil. "You would like an invitation sent to—to your cousins, I suppose?" she said.

Hugh looked at her in surprise. "What cousins?" he asked.

"Sir Richard and Lady Lelacheur," replied Mrs. Churton. "I know that there has been some family disagreement, but on an occasion like this——"

Hugh's face became dark. "I have not the slightest acquaintance with Sir Richard and Lady Lelacheur," he interrupted. "Certainly I do not want them asked, Mrs. Churton."

"Please do not be so impatient, Hugh," proceeded Mrs. Churton in an even voice. "As I understand, it was your father and not yourself who quarrelled with the head of your family, and——"

Hugh interrupted her again. "You will oblige me by not referring again to my relations," he said, in a cold, decisive voice, and Mrs. Churton, after a glance at his face, desisted.

She often now cast these inquiring half-bewildered

looks at him. Since his engagement he seemed to have altered completely. His courtesy to her remained the same, but the determined utterance of his will when they were at issue—as now frequently happened—was something she had by no means looked for. She was beginning to feel doubtful whether she had been wise in pressing him to begin his married life in her house. Certainly she would not gain a useful subservient male, to fall in with her manner of living and add to her opportunities. That had become so plain that it hardly seemed possible that she could at one time have cast Hugh for that rôle in anticipation. If he came into her house he would do so as its master.

And his attitude to Mabilia had changed, not at all in the way of becoming more loverlike. In her more expansive moments of self-communion Mrs. Churton sometimes said that Mabilia was broken-hearted. Mabilia had been dedicated to marriage in her mother's mind for the past twelve years or so, but falling in love with her destined husband had never occurred to Mrs. Churton as a necessary factor in the process. Mabilia knew very well what she wanted in life, and Mrs. Churton regarded her as wanting exactly the same things as herself, although she admitted, when she thought it over, that Mabilia's methods of gaining her ends were more subtle than her own, and possibly more effective. In this proposal of marriage which had at last come to her, redeemed from being a mere taking of the best that offered by the prospective bridegroom's connections, the surprising thing had happened. Mabilia, who

had looked out from hard cold eyes at her vanishing youth so long that no desire seemed to remain to her in matrimony but that of a husband either rich enough or well born enough to bring her some added consideration, had softened before this dark melancholy man who had been willing to make a friend of her, and she had expressed herself willing even to share poverty with him if he so desired it. The evening before Mrs. Churton's last recorded conversation with Hugh, Mabilia had said to her:

"Mother, I wish you had not persuaded me to ask him to live here. He has never been the same to me since."

"My dear," said Mrs. Churton, "you could not possibly have buried yourself in a poky little house in the suburbs. You would have been miserable."

"I am not sure," replied Mabilia; "I don't think I should have been miserable. If only he had pressed me a little more! I should not have stood out; I hardly wanted to. I suppose the fact is he didn't care for me enough. Directly he saw what I wanted he gave way at once. But he is displeased to find out that I did want it. Now, he is just making the best of his promise. But there is to be no love between us. He is not so nice to me as he was before we were engaged."

"He was always cold and reserved."

"Not always, to me. And I believe, if we had been arranging now for our own home, it would have brought us more together. I am very wretched."

"For goodness sake, child, don't begin to grizzle,"

said Mrs. Churton. They were sitting before the fire in Mabilia's room. "It is not in the least like you, and you have everything in your own hands. If you think that he will behave more as you wish him to in a semi-detached villa, by all means take one. It is a curious taste, but you know best what you can do without. I won't stand in your way for an instant."

Mabilia dried her eyes and sat upright in her chair. "No," she said. "It is too late now. If he is pleased to be disappointed in me, I can't help it. I shall have everything that I could ever have expected from marriage—at my age: it would have been much too great a risk to give it all up for something I never have expected—and probably shouldn't have got."

It was true that Hugh's attitude towards Mabilia had changed. He was invariably gravely polite to her, but even the slight intimacy that had existed between them before their engagement had disappeared. He was like one fulfilling a bargain at the least possible expense. He dined with her and her mother every Wednesday night, and spent either Saturday afternoon and evening, or Sunday, with them, never both. He never came to the house unexpectedly, and never wrote to Mabilia except in answer to a note upon some matter of detail. He had suggested this extreme limit of intercourse himself, immediately after the question of their place of abode had been decided, and had opposed to Mrs. Churton's expostulations and Mabilia's air of offence a quiet firmness which contained neither retraction nor explanation.

One evening at the dinner-table, as Easter drew near, Mrs. Churton proposed that he should accompany them for a few days to the Isle of Wight. "We generally have a week or ten days' jaunt then," she said. "It is impossible to remain in town when everybody else is away."

"I am sorry that I shall not be able to come with you," said Hugh. "I have other plans."

Mrs. Churton's rather highly coloured face took on a slight shade of purple. "Other plans!" she echoed. "Surely, Hugh, you do not intend to stay away without Mabilia—and me?"

"I am going down into Dorsetshire by myself," Hugh replied shortly.

Mrs. Churton hesitated a moment, and Hugh prevented her from pursuing the matter further by speaking again in an even voice upon some subject they had previously been discussing.

When the ladies went up into the drawing-room Mrs. Churton said: "Really, Mabilia, you must speak to Hugh about this. He behaves himself as if he were an entirely free man. 'Going down to Dorsetshire by myself,' forsooth! I never heard of such a thing!"

"He is going to Foyle, where his little niece died. I suppose she is buried there, though he has never told me so, and he will not talk about her or his sister. He went down there before he went to Rome at Christmas." She spoke in a passionless voice, looking into the fire.

"Is he always going to hide up his past life from you as if you were the completest stranger?" inquired

Mrs. Churton warmly. "That I should certainly not permit, Mabilia."

"I am afraid it is not a question of my permitting," said Mabilia, in the same low tone. "He did talk to me just a very little about his sister before we were engaged, but he has never done so since. You can see for yourself, mother, that it is of no use my saying anything. He will do as he pleases."

But she did go down to the hall with him that evening as he was leaving the house, and helped him on with his overcoat. "Hugh," she said, "are you going down to Foyle at Easter?"

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"I should like to go with you."

Hugh turned away and took his hat from the hall stand. "Thank you, Mabilia," he said, "I will go alone. Good-night."

It was some weeks after this that Mabilia, egged on by her mother, summoned up courage to address Hugh herself upon the subject of his relations. "Hugh," she said, "I hope you will not be annoyed at my mentioning it. Is it quite out of the question that you should let your cousins know of our engagement?"

"My cousins probably already know of our engagement," replied Hugh stiffly, "as Mrs. Churton took the precaution of advertising it in the newspapers."

There was too much at stake for Mabilia to draw herself up stiffly in return. "I am sorry you objected to that," she said mildly. "Of course, you ought to have been consulted, but an announcement in *The Morn-*

ing Post is so much the usual thing that we never thought you would have minded."

What Hugh had expressed himself about with some severity was his published identification as "son of the late Admiral Lelacheur, C.B., and nephew of the late Sir Simeon Lelacheur, Bart."

"We need say no more about that," he replied, "and I should like you to understand, if you really do not understand already, that Sir Richard Lelacheur is as much a stranger to me as if we did not bear the same name, and I do not understand why you and Mrs. Churton should be so persistent in bringing his name up. At least," he added, with a shade of contempt in his voice, "I suppose I do understand perfectly well."

Mabilia flushed scarlet. "I shall never mention his name again," she said. "But you don't seem to realize that, with all our friends who are coming to the wedding, for you to stand absolutely alone will seem curious. It will certainly seem as if you were ashamed of marrying me."

"I do stand absolutely alone, Mabilia," he replied, more kindly. "You are not marrying the nephew of a baronet; you are marrying a clerk in an Insurance office. If I had not thought you understood that, and were prepared to share my obscurity, I should not have asked you to marry me at all. If you are dissatisfied with me, you can take back your consent. I shall not blame you."

If the wedding day had been farther off; if the numerous acquaintances of the Churtons had been told

less of the satisfactory match Mabilia was about to make; if they had not already begun to respond with silver, glass, and plated tokens; or if Hugh had claimed his freedom with more energy, he might have won it then; for Mabilia was beginning to look forward with some apprehension to her married life, and was tired of the always present, but never openly declared, feeling of having been found out. But she said confusedly: "Of course, I took you for yourself alone," and the preparations for the wedding went on.

CHAPTER XVI

WYSE HALL

PROBABLY there were in England few men of middle age whom the gods had blessed more abundantly than Sir Richard Lelacheur. He had his beautiful historic house in Suffolk, and a rich estate around it; he had a large house in Grosvenor Square; he had a fine steam-yacht, in which he loved to take his pleasure; and he had more than enough money to enable him to extract the full amount of gratification from these temporal possessions. He had besides a wife from whom he was seldom willingly parted, and a family of which he was very proud. His eldest son was nearing twenty; then came three girls some years younger, and then three more boys of between five and eight.

At the time of Hugh's engagement, England was carrying on one of those little frontier wars which come and go, leaving little mark behind them in a nation's memory. Only in scattered homes, gentle and simple, the loss of a life may serve to fix painfully a date, or the hitherto unknown locality of a petty skirmish. Sir Richard Lelacheur's eldest son, who had only just obtained his commission, was killed in action with a handful of his men in the last engagement before the capitulation of the enemy. Almost before the news reached England a still greater tragedy had changed

the whole of Hugh's future. His cousin, with the rest of his family, was coming home from Madeira in his yacht. She was run down on a foggy night by a great liner in mid-ocean, and all on board but a few of the crew were drowned.

Hugh learnt the news as he left his office to go out to luncheon. An evening paper had printed it, and the street was full of crying newsboys, fluttering monstrous headlines. He bought a paper, and was struck with horror at what he read. The vision rose up before him of a kind gentle old man, with whom he had talked many years before. He had spoken of his son and of the one grandchild that had then been born—the young man who now lay in his grave in the far-off hills. Suddenly, Hugh's cousins, whom he had never seen, became real to him, and the terrible catastrophe a personal sorrow.

It seemed impossible to believe in so complete a disaster without corroboration. It occurred to him to go and see Mr. Burham, whose offices were not far away. He took a cab, and met the lawyer at the door of his office. Mr. Burham was little altered, merely a shade greyer and a shade thinner. His face changed as he recognized Hugh, "Ah! come in," he said; "this is a shocking business," and he led the way into his private room.

"Have you had private news?" asked Hugh, in some excitement. "Surely some of them must have been saved!"

Mr. Burham looked at him closely. His voice was

harder as he replied: "Not one. I have just had a telephone message from Mr. Caird, Sir Richard's solicitor. He supposed I was acting for you. I told him I did not wish to take the business from him, in any case. I am just about to retire. I will refer you to Mr. Caird himself."

Hugh had sat down on the nearest chair, and heard Mr. Burham's level voice without taking in the meaning of his speech.

"It is terrible," he said, passing his hand over his forehead.

"You have lost no time in coming to me," said Mr. Burham drily.

"No," replied Hugh. "I had just seen the news. Well, I will not keep you longer, Mr. Burham," and he rose and held out his hand.

"Wait a minute," said the lawyer. "You will want the address of Mr. Caird."

"Mr. Caird?" repeated Hugh. "Oh yes, Sir Richard's lawyer. No; I don't think I want to see him. You have confirmed the news—unhappily."

"But you must see him some time, and you may as well see him at once," said Mr. Burham. "There will be an immense lot of business to be done."

"Business?" Hugh looked at him; and then his face went white, changed to red and went white again. He sat down, still staring at the lawyer. "I never thought of that," he said.

"Well, then, I did you an injustice," replied Mr. Burham, more in his natural tone. "I thought you

had come running here in a hurry to make sure of your new possessions. But I see you didn't, and I apologize. Yes; it's a shocking affair, as all may see. But there are some compensations as far as you are concerned, and I believe you never knew your cousins. You are the only remaining member of your family, and you step straight into the dead man's shoes—title, estates, money, and everything—for Mr. Caird tells me he left no will. He was always about to make one, but put it off from time to time. It is often the way. You had better see Mr. Caird himself about it. Here is his address. He is a friend of mine, and I would advise you to leave your affairs in his hands."

Hugh got out of the room somehow. He could realize nothing of what had happened to him. Regret for the terrible tragedy was still the feeling uppermost in his mind, and he laid no fingers as yet upon the change in his own future. He forgot the sheet of paper in his pocket upon which Mr. Burham had written the address of Sir Richard's lawyer. He went to his usual place for lunch, and afterwards went back to his work. He did what he had to do mechanically, his thoughts far away, and when, after he had sat at his desk for an hour, a question came up which required some concentration to decide upon, he handed his papers to a subordinate clerk and left the office.

Mr. Caird received him with grave respect. He was an iron-grey man with the air of a family physician. "I have been waiting for you since two o'clock, Sir Hugh," he said.

The unexpected use of the title cut its way through the confusion which muffled Hugh's brain, and let in some realization of the immense change which had come upon him. From that moment the terrible fact of a whole family's destruction, which had brought about the change, began to recede in importance, and the stupendous good fortune that it was in his power to enjoy expanded before him. He spent the rest of the afternoon, till a late hour, with the lawyer, went home to dine with him, and got back to his rooms late at night.

The whole of the next day he spent in Mr. Caird's office, engaged in business as arduous as any he had known during the fifteen years of his business life. As he bent his attention to the papers and figures which the lawyer put before him quick gleams of pleasure began to shoot across his brain. The old Elizabethan house, in its setting of ordered garden and wide landscape of sun-steeped meadow, stream, and woodland, began to impress itself on his imagination. At the end of the day's work he had to recall to himself with an effort the price at which it had become his.

Surely, no one had ever yet experienced so bewildering a change of fortune. Without any intervening time of expectation he could step straight into his new position and find himself in command of all that complex machinery that supports the duties and pleasures of a rich landowner. The house in London had been let for the season, but Wyse Hall, the beautiful and historic home of his fathers, ready for its former master's return, needed no further preparation for its

new one than a message to say when he was coming to it.

On the second evening again he dined with Mr. Caird. The agent of the Suffolk property had been summoned to town to meet him. He had held his position only since the beginning of the year, and had seen next to nothing of his employer, who had been first in London and then on his yacht. He was, therefore, less inclined than he might have been to dwell on the tragic cause of his presence at Mr. Caird's dinner-table, and quite ready to pour out information and description for the benefit of the new owner. He was a youngish, energetic, rather horsey-looking man, with a ready tongue. Hugh was not inclined to take readily to him, but treated him with his usual reserved, rather distant courtesy.

The three men sat after dinner drinking their wine in the lawyer's dining-room, pleasantly facing on to Kensington Gardens. The window was open to the soft breezes of the summer evening, which, even in London at its most crowded time, carry the thoughts away to country meadows, knee deep in grass and flowers, whispers of leaves under a quiet sky, and all the sweet sounds and scents of June.

"I shall go down to Wyse Hall tomorrow," said Hugh abruptly. "We have settled everything that needs to be settled, I think; and the rest can wait."

He walked home presently across the park. His old life was behind him, and his thoughts were full of pleasant anticipation. When he reached his rooms he found a note awaiting him from Mabilia Churton. If

he had thought of her at all during these last two days it had been with the surface of his brain only. This was one of the evenings on which he dined regularly at her mother's house. He had entirely forgotten the fact. The note was tentatively reproachful, alluded to the change in his fortunes, and was addressed to him as Sir Hugh Lelacheur, Bart. A momentary compunction seized him at having failed to send a message excusing his absence that evening. He sat down and wrote a hurried reply to Mabilia's letter. He had been so busy that he had not a moment to himself. He had been obliged to dine with his lawyer that evening, and was sorry that in his hurry he had omitted to send word to that effect. He was going down to Suffolk the next morning, and would write to her from there. He went out and posted the note himself, and before he had dropped it into a pillar-box Mabilia and her mother had gone out of his head.

Hugh left London the next morning, and arrived in the afternoon at the little wayside station which was the nearest to Wyse Hall, but even then six miles off. The head coachman had thought it fitting that on this his first entrance to his new kingdom he should be conveyed to the home of his ancestors in the stately barouche which was waiting for him. The station-master opened the door of his compartment, and a footman took over his modest Gladstone bag from the porter, an obvious curiosity tempering the respectful demeanour of all three of them. The coachman touched his hat from his seat of state. He and the footman had

bands of crape on their arms, but were otherwise resplendent in liveries more elaborate than ordinary.

The little branch-line train steamed off fussily, and Hugh found himself rolling through drowsy country lanes, with the westering sun shining over fields where the haymakers were at work. The wide deep-grassed meadows, the green woods, the flower-decked hedgerows, the old villages with their thatched and garden-bordered cottages, and the square towers of their great churches, the leisurely country people who turned to stare at him on the road—all appealed to him with an immeasurable sense of restfulness, after the hurry of the last two days and the monotonous dulness of his London life. As the miles went by, and he thought that he must be getting near his journey's end, his content began to be touched with excitement, which held him entirely when the carriage rolled through a pair of iron gates, flanked by two lodges of weather-beaten brick and stone, and entered a level park of beech and oak and fern, through the trees of which, not far off, he could see the stately length of the old Elizabethan hall, with its carved and mullioned windows, high-pitched roofs and twisted chimney-stacks.

Tea was brought to him in a pleasant morning-room, opening on to the beautiful gardens at the back of the house. The room had been in constant use by the family of his cousin. Their books and music, the photographs of their friends, and all the many little things that give a living-room something of the character of its inhabitants, were scattered about it. It was difficult

to believe that those who had lived their easy life in it would occupy it no more, that their intimate possessions had lost their meaning, which seemed, indeed, rudely wrenched away from them, since they now belonged, the largest and the smallest, to him, a stranger.

He refused the offer of the staid housekeeper to show him over the rooms, feeling a sense of shame that he, a Lelacheur, should know as little of the contents of his historic house as any summer tourist. And he wanted to be alone, to enjoy it with himself. He, Sir Hugh Lelacheur of Wyse Hall, wanted to take himself, as Hugh Lelacheur, the London clerk, by the hand, to show him all the treasures of his house and to watch his wondering appreciation of them.

So for an hour he wandered over the great house, with no one but his old self to bear him company. The servants were in their own quarters, busily engaged, no doubt, in discussing him. He went through the beautiful rooms, so full of gracious memories of the past, and lingered in the long library, flooded with afternoon sunlight, which threw patterns of armorial glass on the faded floor, through windows looking on to lawns and cedars. It was very old and very quiet, with wonderfully carved ranges of bookshelves, full of calf and vellum bound quartos and folios, with massive carved oak tables and high carved chairs, seated with cane or cushioned velvet, and at either end great open fireplaces surmounted by marble chimneypieces.

He penetrated into other rooms that had been more intimately occupied by those whose place he was now

filling. In the midst of satisfaction sorrow came to him again. Little children had run about the oaken floors and called down the wide staircases. He saw their rooms—a sunny nursery with birds singing in the windows, and another large room with little white beds in it, and everything very clean and fresh. The sight brought back his own old grief, and he went out of the rooms hurriedly, and shut the doors on their reproachful emptiness.

He went out into the gardens and wandered about over the soft lawns and among the bright June flowers until it was time to go in to dinner. He went out again afterwards, and stayed until the short summer night began to close in on trees and grass and flowers, but his happiness was crossed with melancholy, for he had no one with whom to share it. So, at least, he told himself, forgetting that he was to be married in a month's time.

CHAPTER XVII

MARGARET

Hugh opened his eyes at dawn the next morning. A flood of happiness came over him and he realized where he was, and that a summer day in the midst of these lovely surroundings was before him, to spend as he liked, and many summer days after this should have run its course. His windows were wide open to the east. He rose and looked out on to trees and lawns, now shrouded in mysterious twilight, and was reminded of the days of his boyhood, when he and Anne had so often risen with the birds, and steeped themselves in the freshness of awakening Nature. Years of sedentary life had robbed him of the desire to leave his bed several hours before the rest of the world should be preparing to rise, and he relinquished his half-formed resolution to dress and go into the garden, and lay, sometimes asleep and sometimes awake, while the sun climbed higher into the sky.

As he finished his breakfast Gillett, the agent, arrived, with proposals for a busy morning. He wanted to introduce him to the bailiff and the head keeper and various other functionaries; to show him what was being done as to this and that, and generally to initiate him into the mysteries of the management of a large estate. Hugh, with great reluctance, resigned his morn-

ing, and was presently being driven from one place to another in a high dogcart behind a fast-trotting horse, listening to all sorts of information which did not interest him. When the long morning was over, and Gillett was beginning to make suggestions for a similar afternoon, to be spent in inspecting outlying farms and coverts, Hugh made a grasp at his independence.

"There will be plenty of time for all this by-and-by," he said. "For the next week, at least, I want to hear nothing about estate management. I want to find my way about the place by myself and get to know it."

"But how can you get to know it," said Gillett, "unless you have some one to tell you everything? You want to take the reins, don't you?"

"No, not yet," answered Hugh. "I know nothing of all the things we have been talking about this morning, and I don't know that I care very much. At present the house and the gardens and the country are enough for me. The estate can wait."

Gillett went away with a shrug of his broad shoulders. The country to him meant agriculture and sport; and a landowner who declined to take up his responsibilities, but preferred to idle away his time in his house and garden, was much like a man put in charge of a large business undertaking who should devote himself to admiring the convenience of his offices and the perfection of his stationery.

Left to himself, Hugh breathed again. His morning's occupation had been utterly distasteful to him. He had felt like a boy compelled to sit down on the

first day of his emancipation from school and work at a holiday task. He had been relieved when the agent refused his invitation to lunch, and his spirits rose as he contemplated his afternoon's freedom.

During his morning's drive he had noticed, some way across the meadows, about a mile from his house, a picturesque mill, the lichened roofs of which could be seen across the fields from the road, through the trees which surrounded it. Gillett, jerking an elbow in its direction, had said: "That's your Naboth's vineyard," and had told him the story of an old recluse, who owned the mill and a few acres of orchard and meadow, in the middle of Hugh's property, and refused to sell, or even to consider proposals for a sale.

"No one ever sees him," Gillett had said, throwing out his information in a series of jerky sentences. "Paston, his name is. He makes a fair living out of the mill and his orchards, but he leaves the dealing to his man. They say he reads a lot, and knows a lot. I don't know how that may be. He's a Roman Catholic, or said to be. But the only friend he has is old Freeling, the parson at Swathling, over there." He pointed towards a church tower standing on a slight eminence some four or five miles away. "He's a queer old bachelor, Freeling. He's bookish too, and rich. Paston has a granddaughter. I hear she's just come home from France. They say old Freeling has paid for her education at a convent there. They say he'll marry her, but that's probably scandal. He's old enough to be her father. When Paston dies there may be a chance

of buying. You ought to have the place, of course; but it's no use trying as long as he's alive."

Collecting his painting materials, Hugh bethought him of the old timbered mill with its tall poplars and sliding water-race, and made his way along the banks of the stream which ran through his fields and filled the moat that surrounded his house. It wound its way, in a very leisurely fashion, through the hayfields, with many twists and turns, and it was only after following its course for over half-an-hour that he came at last to the old mill. The sight of it, on this still afternoon of high summer, was enough to gladden the eyes of an artist. It stood reflected in clear water, flanked by great trees, and surrounded by an apple orchard. The wheel was silent, but underneath the bridge by which the mill was approached the water ran with a musical ripple, spreading fanwise into the stillness of the wide pool. White pigeons wheeled in the air and cooed on the ridges of the roof. The bees droned among the clover. From some distant hayfield came the sound of a scythe being sharpened. The water murmured lazily. The place seemed to lie at the very heart of summer.

With a sigh of contentment he sat down under the shade of a great chestnut-tree and began his drawing. Soon he had sketched in his picture and begun to use his colours. He grew absorbed in his work, and thought he was painting better than he had ever done before.

He worked for half-an-hour, and during that time

no sign of human life about the old mill had disturbed his solitude. But presently he saw a girl come out on to the staging which ran alongside the mill-pool. She unfastened a punt that lay by a flight of shallow wooden steps, and stepping into it began to push herself down the stream towards him. At first he felt rather annoyed by this intrusion on his solitude. But, as the girl came nearer to him across the sunlit water, his mild feeling of irritation gave way to one of interest. Her graceful movements pleased his eye, for she was tall and lissom, and used the natural swing of her body, apparently without effort, in propelling herself. Her dress was blue, and she wore a wide-brimmed hat of coarse straw, trimmed with cornflowers. Her hands, which she raised above her head at each plunge of the pole into the water, were white and slender.

So much could be seen at first. As she came nearer, Hugh discovered that her hair was brown and abundant, next that her dress was of cool linen and fitted her slender figure to perfection, then, somehow, that her eyes as well as her gown were blue, and finally that she was beautiful, but very young. Her figure was that of a woman, but she had the fair frank gaze of a child, and a child's innocence and curiosity looked out of her eyes as she caught sight of him sitting under the tree, and gazed full at him, with the merest hint of confusion at having been observed when she had thought herself alone. A sudden impulse made him rise and take a step towards the water, so that when the next stroke of the pole brought her opposite to him it looked as if he

were waiting on the bank for her. And she, as if she were expecting him to speak, stopped and stood looking up at him out of wide blue eyes, her lips a little apart. There was a moment's pause. If it had lasted a fraction of a second longer they would have parted in confusion with no word spoken. But Hugh broke the silence just in time. "I hope there is no objection to my sketching from here?" he said rather lamely.

"Oh no, not the least," she answered. Her voice was musical and full-throated, and there was the least little suspicion of a foreign intonation. But her words came as frankly as the gaze of her child's eyes, and she looked away from him with obvious curiosity to the little easel that he had set up under the shade of the chestnut.

"Would you like to look at it?" he asked. "It isn't much—at least, not yet."

"Oh yes, if you please," she said, and guided her punt underneath the bank where he was standing. He gave her his hand to help her out on to the grass, and presently he was using his brush again while she was sitting at his feet talking to him as if she had known him all her life.

She told him of the years she had spent in the French convent school, in an old Norman town of narrow streets, stone houses, and high-piled red roofs. There had been a few other English girls there, but French had been her tongue for nine or ten years, and, as she told him the story of her childhood, she used French phrases, sometimes hesitated for a word, and

sometimes used a wrong one, with a little apologetic laugh and a movement of her hands.

She had been happy with the nuns. One of them had made a favourite of her and had gained her adoration. "When we went into the great stone kitchen, all *badigeonée*, you know, and so clean, to learn to cook, I used to make cakes for her. She loved them. She gave me some little pictures and a medal. They are my greatest treasures. Then there came a girl from her own home in Brittany, and I found out that she loved her better than me. I was miserable for a long time, and furiously jealous. But, after a time, I did not care any longer, and when Jeanette—that was the other girl's name—went away and she wanted me again, I did not want her any more." She laughed at herself. "They are like that, the nuns," she said. "But they were dear people and very devout. They made you want to be good."

She had never come home during her schooldays. Sometimes she had visited the homes of her schoolfellows during the holidays, sometimes she had stayed at the convent, and, except that she liked a change sometimes, that had been almost better, for the nuns had made her very happy in the holidays.

But during her long exile she had often thought of the old millhouse, and the drone of the waterwheel, and the dappled shadows on the orchard grasses. At first she had been terribly homesick, and as she had become more at home in the convent she had still, at intervals, longed to come back to the beautiful English coun-

try. She had returned only a month ago, and had found it no less beautiful and peaceful than her childish memories had painted it.

She spoke of her grandfather: of the white head bent over a book in an old oaken room, while the clock ticked solemnly in the corner, and the night breezes stirred the curtains and the flowers in the casement windows. She told him of the other kind old man who, in some way she did not quite understand, had a claim on her reverence and affection, a debt which she found it very easy to pay. She described the long happy days of her present life, from the time of her rising in the early morning to her rest in the sweet silence of the summer night. She had no duties to perform in her grandfather's house, but was content to live in simple enjoyment of her surroundings in the unbroken June weather.

She talked like a happy child to an older friend, but interwoven with her childish confidences ran the thread of maturer thoughts. Her innocent soul was full of the love of Nature and the love of mankind. She was a revelation to Hugh. He had never imagined that he could find his own secret delights so enchantingly reflected in the mind of another.

But in answer to all that she revealed of herself, he told her nothing, not even his name.

He had long since finished his drawing, and was spoiling it by additional touches, so that he might listen to her as long as she pleased to talk to him. The sun touched the tops of one of the poplar spires. She

sprang to her feet and shook out her skirt with a gesture purely feminine. "I have talked and talked," she said, with a little laugh. "The nuns always told me that my tongue ran away with me. And you have not talked at all, but have done nothing but listen to me."

"I can't talk while I am painting," replied Hugh, in a matter-of-fact voice, which concealed a ferment of feeling. "But it helps me to listen. I have finished much more quickly than I should have done if you had not come here to keep me company."

She looked at his picture of the scene she loved so well. "I think it is beautiful," she said. "How I should have liked to have it to remind me, all the long years I was in France!"

"Would you like to have it now?" he asked.

Her face lit up with pleasure. "Oh! may I?" she cried. "It is beautiful. My grandfather will admire it as much as I do."

"Don't show it to him," said Hugh, his face hidden from her as he cut the paper off the board. "I will paint you a much better one."

"I don't think you could," she said, with another little clear full-throated laugh. "But you shall try. And may I come and watch you?"

"Yes, you may," he said quietly.

"I love watching people paint," she said. "It has been very interesting. And you are sure I have not worried you with my chatter? Somehow, I felt inclined to talk to you, and you have listened very patiently." Again the quick thrushlike trill of laughter,

which quickened his pulse every time he listened to it. "You shall tell me about yourself the next time, and it will be my turn to listen. You have rather a sad face."

There was a change in her voice. She stood with her hat in her hand before her, the sun shining on the warm undulations of her hair, and looked into his face.

"I have no reason to be sad now," he said, returning her gaze. "I shall be here tomorrow morning, at ten o'clock. Will you be here too?"

There was a quiver of her long eyelashes, as if something of that which lay behind his steadfast gaze had stirred her unawakened soul and troubled it a little. "Yes, I will come," she said, looking away from him.

"Then good-bye," he said, and turned away, not trusting himself to take her hand.

Hugh walked home along the riverside with the step of a young man. The lines of his grave face were softened, his eyes were humid, his mouth tender. All his mind was irradiated. The river ran for him and sang a tune; the light airs that fanned him whispered happy secrets, the trees and the grass and the meadow flowers were painted in colours of incredible brightness. When he came to his own park, and saw across ferny glades and hollows the long western front of his old house, its mellow stone and brick work warmed by the sun, its windows shining, it became suddenly more than a rich palace of old treasure. It welcomed him as a home, where for centuries men had lived and loved and died. Its beauty and the joy of possession merged

themselves into the current of his happiness, and heightened it.

As he wandered about the rooms and galleries of the house, and over the lawns of the garden, among flowers and trees and fountains, in a blissful solitude; as he dressed and dined, waited upon by silent servants, but anxious to get rid of them, he was living again in the hours of the afternoon, longing for the slow light to fade and bring him to the night, and so to another day of happiness. His past life had slipped away from him, and into the future he looked no farther forward than the morrow. He moved in a sort of trance. Little things were real to him, but not big ones. He could see the insects dancing in the evening sunlight, the colours of the grass and flowers; he could hear the plash of the fountains in their lilied pools, the light rustle of the tree tops; but his eyes were blind to the ties that bound him, and his ears deaf to the call of new duties.

The next morning he rose early, and the hours went slowly until he could go again to the riverside by the mill. Again he settled himself by the pool under the great chestnut. But his eyes now continually sought the staging which ran along the side of the house over the water. His heart leapt as he saw the slim blue-clad figure appear. She waved her hand to him, unfastened the punt and stepped into it. He looked at her with intense eager gaze as she poled herself over the water towards him, but his eyes were no more than friendly as they rested on her for a moment while he

helped her to land, and when he had tied up the punt, and stood upright again before her, his control over himself was complete. At all costs he must avoid frightening her by a hint of his quick-grown passion.

"I am going to paint you a bigger and more careful picture," he said, and she expressed her delight, standing at his shoulder.

"I ought to have brought some work," she said, as she sank down on the grass at his side. "I am very idle; but I promised myself a holiday as long as this lovely weather lasted, and this is the way I like to spend it.

"Do you know," she went on, before he could reply, "you have never told me your name, or where you come from, or where you are staying; and I have told you everything about myself."

"You have not told me your name."

She laughed lightly. "Didn't I?" she said, "I thought I had told you everything there was to tell. My name is Margaret—Margaret Paston. What is yours?"

There was the least little pause. Hugh looked up from his board, looked down again, and drew a line. "My name is Hugh Lelacheur," he said.

She stared up at him for a moment, and her face changed. "Are you Sir Hugh Lelacheur of Wyse Hall?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, his eyes on his drawing.

She was silent for a space. He did not dare to look at her. But when the silence became oppressive he

stole a glance aside. She was sitting half turned towards him, resting on one hand, while the other lay along the folds of her skirt and held her straw flower-trimmed hat. Her head was bent. The sunlight filtering through leaves played on the gold of her hair. He could see her lowered lashes and a flushed cheek. She looked up at him steadily. "If I had known that," she said, "I should not have talked to you as I did yesterday."

"Why not?" he asked lamely.

She looked down again. "I thought you were just an artist," she said. "One talks to artists. I used to stay in Brittany with a girl from the convent. Her father was an artist—and all their friends. That was why I was so pleased to see you yesterday. I thought you were like that."

"And wasn't I like that?"

She looked up at him again. "Yes, you were," she said. "That is why we got on together. But you were keeping something back from me all the time. That wasn't quite fair, was it?"

"What you say I was keeping back did not seem to me of much importance yesterday," he said; "you must remember I have only been Sir Hugh Lelacheur of Wyse Hall for a very short time. When I have had the chance, I have tried to be an artist all my life."

"And when I first saw you, you were painting, and had forgotten—all the rest?"

"I forgot it all the afternoon."

She looked down again and seemed to be turning this over in her mind, while he went on drawing.

Presently, she gave a little cry and he looked down at her, startled.

"It was dreadful," she said, "the ship going down in the middle of the night, and the poor little children—oh!" She covered her face with her hands.

"You think that I ought not to be happy?" he said quickly. "I see it all sometimes, as you do. But I never knew my cousins. I never saw any of them."

She looked at him with some curiosity. He laid down his pencil. "Shall I tell you about myself?" he asked. "I have lost so much in life, and I have been so much alone, that you won't think it strange that I am enjoying the good fortune that has come to me if I tell you everything."

"I told you everything about myself yesterday," she said.

"You told me because we had become friends at once, didn't you? One can tell things to a friend that one keeps for the most part to one's self."

"Yes; tell me," she said.

He told her, shortly, of his childhood, of his school-days culminating in his rejection for the navy, of his sojourn in France under the care of Mr. Williams. The story became fuller when he came to Foyle and Anne, and she began to ask him questions and to show her sympathy. The tears came into her eyes when he described his lonely life in London, with his father dead and Anne on the other side of the world, and she uttered

a cry of pain when he told her of little Anne's death.

He had spoken simply and without seeking effect, but he had won her. Her sudden realization of him as the rich man at whose gates her grandfather lived in humble independence was overcome by her knowledge of him as a friend, whose sadness she could soothe by her pity. He had revealed himself to her as he had revealed himself to no one since his boyhood and Anne's marriage. He had told her more of himself in half-an-hour than he had told Mabilia in eight months.

But he told her nothing of Mabilia or of his engagement.

They were together for the whole morning, and they parted reluctantly. When they met again in the afternoon, little more than an hour afterwards, their intimacy was already so close that they hurried towards each other, and the talk began again where it had ended, without any interval of restraint. The shadow of the poplars drew out across the water and touched them where they sat before they parted.

They stood facing one another, and looked into each other's eyes. Hers were frank and kind; but he could not keep the yearning out of his.

"Will you come again tomorrow morning?" he asked, his voice slightly tremulous.

The question, answered with frank pleasure the day before, took on such new and immense significance from the tone and the look that she was instantly confused and frightened, turned her head away, and would have flown.

He seized her hands. "Margaret," he cried, "you sha'n't go until you promise me. I have been waiting all my life for you. I'm not going to lose you now. I can't pretend any more. I love you better than anything in the world."

He poured out burning words and drew her to him. She trembled, and made a movement as if to escape, but he held her fast.

She lifted up her face to his. "Oh! I don't know," she cried, "I don't know. Let me go now."

"No; not till you tell me you love me. I love you so much that you must—a little—dearest child!"

She gazed at him as if fascinated, and her face began to change, to lose its frightened look, to become softer.

He saw the change the moment its shadow crept over her eyes. He uttered a little cry of joy, and kissed her. She lay still in his arms, and he held her closely to him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DREAM

The next morning they met as lovers, trembling and flushed with divine happiness. Directly he came to the bank of the pool he saw the flutter of her blue dress round the corner of the millhouse, and she came straight to him across the water. As she came gliding towards him his heart went through alternations of hope and fear. Was she coming to him to renew the rapture of the evening before, or had she bethought herself, and would he have to struggle against reserve and maidenly shrinking for possession of her? One look from her eyes when she came near enough for him to read her face put to flight the shadow of fear. They held timidity, but it only coloured the innocence of her joy. Her soul was awakened and looked out of clear windows, unashamed. He helped her to land, and she came to his arms like a dove to its nest.

"I thought the hours would never pass," he said; and she: "I have never been so happy."

They met, morning and afternoon, for many days. The sky was blue, and soft breezes rustled the young leaves of the poplars, and sent ripples over the springing corn. They were together in the orchard, in the flowery meadows, on the banks of the stream, in the June woodlands, musical with bird notes, carpeted with

wild hyacinths and white starlike anemones. To Hugh, the peace of the quiet country was like water in the desert of a disappointed life; and his passion for the girl who came out of the heart of it to bear him company through long happy days and to leave her image in his brain through blissful nights, burnt like flame. The years slipped from him and he was young again, as young in spirit as she was in years, young and happy as he had been in the old days at Foyle, now far distant.

So far as he knew there were no witnesses to their meetings. But he was so taken out of himself by the fierce delight that had come into his life that he would not have cared if all the world had been aware of them.

His servants threw curious looks at him as he came into the house for meals, and left it again immediately afterwards. More than once his agent tried to interview him, but was impatiently dismissed. He had the presence of mind to make his painting an excuse for his desire for an unhampered solitude, but it would have been plain to see, if he had eyes to see it, that his dependants regarded him as rather more than eccentric. His correspondence accumulated and was untouched. Nothing was done that he had come down to do. Nothing was done at all.

Then, one afternoon, it seemed to him that out of the shadows of life he saw his servant coming towards him to hand him a telegram. He waved him away, but the old man met him with resolution, insisting that there was an answer, and that the messenger was waiting.

The telegram was a long one, from Mrs. Churton, alluding to letters unanswered, asking if he were ill, and ending with the announcement that she should come to Wyse Hall the next day if she did not hear from him.

As he stood staring at the sheets of flimsy pink paper part of the dream mist cleared away from his brain. He saw that he must act, and his first impulse was to write a letter, heralded by a telegram, which should rid him of the Churtons for ever. He sent the telegram. He was well, and they would receive a letter from him the next morning. Then he took up his painting materials and left the house.

As he went across the deserted meadows towards the mill, by a route which his lover's impatience had long since substituted for the longer one by the river bank, his brain cleared further. He would still get rid of his entanglement; there was no question about that. But he must do it diplomatically, for the sake of the girl whom he loved. No gossip must smirch her when he had made her his own. A new thrill quickened his footsteps. Their love had burnt to a blaze with no looking forward, no foreboding to damp its flame. They had lived entirely in the present, and never looked into the future, except at parting, and then only to the next morning, that should bring them together again. Now, forced to look forward, he saw only the new and strange happiness of spending his life with her. He would tell her all that her love had swept away from his mind. She would find one more reason for her sweet pity in

the life that was behind him, and she would crown his happiness by promising to become his bride.

She was waiting for him in the cool recesses of the wood. She had never hitherto been before him at the trysting place. Her greeting told him that it was only another instance of her love for him, which was as deep as his, and as impatient. He held her in a long embrace, looking into the depths of her trusting eyes.

"Will you come and be with me always?" he asked her.

She smiled up at him. "Now is always, when I am with you," she said. "But you have something to tell me. I can see it in your eyes."

"I could not keep anything from you if I would," he replied. "You would mark every shadow; but there will be no shadows in life when we are always together."

"Tell me," she said, "what is troubling you."

"Promise first to be my wife, and I will tell you everything."

A shadow passed over her own face, and her eyes fell. "There is some trouble," she said, and looked up at him again pleadingly; "we have been too happy. Today the house seemed cold, and I came out into the sunlight to meet you. Tell me, dearest, while you hold me in your arms."

He told her baldly. He had been engaged to another woman, and before they could be happy together for ever he must rid himself of the tie.

She shrank from him as if he had struck her. Her

face went white, and she covered it with her hands. "Oh! why didn't you tell me before?" she moaned.

He took possession of her hands, almost roughly. "What does it matter?" he said. "I have never given her a thought since I met you. She was never anything to me. Now she is less than nothing."

"Tell me about it," she said. "How can you say she is nothing to you when you are going to marry her? Oh! how could you do such a thing?"

Her knees were trembling. She sank down on to the grass, and he threw himself down beside her. "How could you ask her to marry you if you did not love her?"

"Listen," he said. "You know what my life has been. You know that after all I have lost I could never expect love would come into it. If I had not met you I should never have known what love was. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes," she said; "I was waiting for you."

"We were friends, she and I—hardly perhaps even that. But I had got into the way of going to the house where she and her mother lived. After a time I came to understand that I was expected to ask her to marry me. I didn't care much what became of me. I won't say anything against her, but she was not quite what I thought her. I shouldn't have asked her if I had known her better. I was sorry I had done so. But I was prepared to go through with it."

"Ah! how could you?" she said again. "And you loved her no better than that!"

"I never loved her at all. There was never a spark of love for her. How could there be when it is you I love?"

"I can understand what you mean by that," she said. "I thought we were so close together that I could understand all your thoughts. But to ask some one to marry you for no better reason than that she expected it of you! Why did she expect it of you?"

He looked at her tenderly. "My darling," he said, "you don't know the world, thank God! She is not a girl; she is not much younger than I am. There are women, not bad women—she is not that—who would rather have a loveless marriage than none at all."

"Yes; but you! Are men like that too?"

"No. But there are other things a man may desire in marriage. You know how lonely my life has been. You can understand what I thought marriage might give me."

"Yes," she said softly, and lifted her hand to his dark head. "I can understand that."

"Then you absolve me. I couldn't have done it if I had known what I know of love now. It would have seemed like sacrilege. But I was blind then. It was the only thing in my life that I haven't told you of. There is nothing more between us, now."

His relief at the touch of her hand had been unbounded. Horrible depths of misunderstanding and separation had seemed to reveal themselves. But her caress had closed them. He would have drawn her to him again. But she resisted, looking at him piteously.

"Oh, why did you do it?" she said, once again. "There is that between us. It will put an end to our love."

"Put an end to our love?" he cried, horrified. "How can it do that? We are one, already. Nothing can part us."

She was all tenderness again. "I shall love you always," she said, gazing into his eyes. "And you will love me. I know that. But we cannot come together any more."

Behind her weakness there was strength. He caught a glimpse of it through the tears in her eyes, and again the chasm of separation yawned before him.

"Listen," he said again, imprisoning her hands in his. "I did wrong to engage myself to this woman. But it would be a thousand times more wrong to go back to her now, and leave you. I have claimed you, and you have given yourself to me. I belong to you, everything that I am, and you belong to me. You shall be my wife. I will take you. It is my right."

She looked at him long and earnestly. "I do belong to you," she said. "I love you with every part of me. Nothing can take that away from me. But you must go back to her. No; listen to me now, my dearest. We have been living in a dream. Somehow I think I knew all along that it could not last. But we never thought of the future, did we? And even if I had not known of this, how could I have married you? We belong to different worlds."

He shook his head impatiently. "That is not like you," he said. "Supposing it had been I who had

said it! Even if I had been all my life what I am now, in the eyes of the world, you would still be high above me; except that our love would have brought us together. And to compare you with that other! Your mind is as beautiful as your body. You have no thoughts that are not noble. You are a fitting mate for the highest."

"You must think of me like that," she said tenderly, "but you must say good-bye to me. Don't make me weak. It will be hard enough to bear. But you must keep your promise. You would not be the man I love if you broke it."

For an hour he fought with her, trying to break her resolution. Many times she seemed on the point of giving way, and many times she wept in his arms and he thought he held her for ever. But her purpose remained through all her vacillations. He must keep faith. She would not be his even if he broke it.

At last there came a pause in his pleading. He sat dumbly, rage against Fate and against her shaking him. He knew he had nothing more to say, and flung a taunt at her. "Your love is worth nothing," he said.

There was no answer but her sobbing.

He flung himself at her feet. "No; it is the greatest treasure I have ever had," he said. "Oh, don't send me away. Only you can save me."

It was the cry of weakness and terror that pierces the soul. She threw her arms round him and kissed him, and strength rose within her, though her heart was

riven. "My dearest," she said, "the dream is over. Now we must face the world and be brave. Neither of us will ever forget. You will be good to her, won't you? Perhaps she loves you too; but not as much as I do. I shall pray for your happiness. Perhaps some day I shall see your children. I know they will comfort you. Oh, my darling! good-bye!"

He clung to her passionately, as if by holding her body he could hold her soul. She lay still in his arms till his grasp relaxed. Then she rose to her feet. "Good-bye," she said again, smiling, and turned and went away from him through the trees, leaving him beaten, and, once more, empty of hope.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AWAKENING

Hugh went back to his house after a while. His dream was over, but he was hardly yet awake. He could not grasp what had happened to him. It was impossible to think that he would see her no more, impossible that he should have taken his dismissal, unable to impose his will upon hers.

He went up into the old library, and sat there for hours, while the square of sunshine thrown by the long row of windows crept along the floor and threw latticed patterns and a stain of colour on the polished oak.

He had not accepted defeat. He laughed at the idea. He would win her yet. He would force her to see that a love such as theirs swept away all petty conventions. Was it not allowable for a man to withdraw from an engagement such as his, when so much was at stake? It was done every day. It had only been, as he had said, because he had not cared much what became of him, that he had not claimed his release weeks before, when he had found out the meanness of Mabilia's ambitions, when he had been disappointed of the very little he had hoped from her. Oh, God! Why had he not done so?

"You would not be the man I love if you did not keep your promise." The words, and the tone in which

they had been uttered, came to him. He must set himself to see with her eyes, that he might find the point at which to assail her; for he knew, at least, that a repetition of the prayers and arguments of the afternoon would not avail him.

He melted at the thought of her love for him. It was of the essence of a great passion: it would condone weakness, but not dishonour. Dishonour would destroy it. The loved one must be worshipped as noble; ignoble he could be worshipped no longer, and, if loved at all, only on a lower and reconstituted plane; in that case love would no longer be the perfect flower, but a weed that could never grow in the soil of such a nature as hers.

Yes; but if there was no dishonour? That was what he must prove, if he could still hope to win her.

Painfully, and with inward shrinking, he put himself into her place. He loved her with a love as high as hers. He loved her because she was noble and sweet and good. If he could imagine her to have done something, or to be contemplating something, dishonourable, could he love her so well? It was impossible to imagine such a thing. It would not be she, but some one else; and it was she whom he loved.

Then that was the answer.

Ah! but that was agreed. If it were something dishonourable on his part that stood between them, she would be right. He must take a lower place in her eyes. No, worse than that. The man she had

loved would be dead, and he, a stranger, would be standing before her in his image.

Again he must put himself in her place. If she had confessed to him what he had confessed to her? Suppose she had bound herself to a loveless marriage; had taken his love and gloried in it, and said nothing about that tie, until it was forced upon her; then had made light of it and said that their love must be her excuse for breaking it!

The sweat broke out upon his forehead as he forced himself to put the case. Could he really seem to her like that?

He looked at it in every way, striving to be honest and impartial. There *was* a difference. A young girl could not in the natural circumstances of her life have acted in just that way, and been what this girl was.

But there might be parallel circumstances. A promise might have been drawn from her, perhaps by her parents, to marry a man she had liked but did not love, not at once, but at some future time, so that it did not weigh on her mind, she not knowing in her innocence that love might come and make her promise as heavy as lead. Well, surely in that case no nice sense of honour could bind her. If only he had thought of putting that to her!

Ah! but it was not an exact parallel. He had taken the initiative. There had been no compulsion on him. He had lightly plighted his troth and proposed as lightly to escape from it. "How could you do such a

thing?" It was the treachery against all that she held sacred in love that had hurt her, the deliberate invitation to a union without any love at all to sanctify it. If he could act like that, then the very love he had given her was suspect. He was not what she had thought him.

And the conviction now slowly grew upon him that the mischief was already done, that the knell of his hopes had been struck long before he had begun to cherish them; that it was his asking in marriage the hand of a woman he did not love, and not his acceptance by that woman, that had changed him in her eyes. It was not the man to whom she had given her love who had done that, it was another whom she did not know. And if he were free tomorrow, if Mabilia died, or gave him his freedom, still she would not marry him. She would part from him now for ever, with the glory of the dream still upon her; but if he forced himself on her he would see the glory fade away. By gaining he would lose her.

He threw off this idea impatiently. She loved him, and there must be some way of winning her. But it came up before him again and again, each time with more force than before. He knew her so well, knew her thoughts and her ideals, and the spiritual essence that illumined her passion. At last he was sure that he had read her mind aright, more clearly, perhaps, than she had read it herself, that the door was in truth closed upon him, and that it was no more in her power than in his to open it.

Then he gave way to despair. Why had Fate dealt so cruelly with him? Why was this glimpse of perfect happiness shown to him, just to be snatched from his grasp, and his life made more wretched than before?

Anger followed despair. He would gain his release from Mabilia. Then he would go and take her, by violence if need be. He would force happiness on her in spite of herself.

Too late! The seeds of decay were already disintegrating her love. He could have given her a life's happiness a year ago. Now, whatever he did, he could only bring her misery.

Then his own nature began to rise up against him. He had spent many years in self-restraint and patient acceptance of the second best. The habits of a lifetime were crying within him to be resumed. He had surrendered himself wholly to the delight of the hour and the pendulum was swinging back. He had told Anne once that he was afraid of happiness, and the happiness that at that time seemed to be in his grasp had quickly changed into gloom. However he might struggle now, he would fare no better. He was not to be blessed, in life or in love.

There followed a more exalted mood. She had asked this sacrifice of him, had asked it as if he owed it to her and to his higher self. Was there nothing but inexplicable obliquity in her view of the case? Right or wrong, she had sacrificed herself to it. What if he did her bidding, went through with his hard task, and resigned all claim to her? He would be once again the

lover of whom she had demanded of right all noble action. He would lose her body, but he would be enshrined in the secret places of her soul.

He sat for a long time in the silent sunny room. The tumult of his thoughts died away. He suffered deeply, but the peace of resignation began to steal over him. By-and-by he rose and went to a writing-table. To her he wrote, lingering over the words that she would hold in her hand: "I will do as you wish, but my love is yours always." And to Mrs. Churton, that he would return to London the next morning.

He rang the bell and ordered a cart to be brought round for him which he would drive himself. He should not be back to dinner. Some supper might be laid for him to await his return.

He drove to the post town seven miles away, dropped his letters in the box, and drove back again in the dusk. There was a heavy dew and the air was full of sharp sweetness. Night moths flitted about him, his horse's hoofs beat rhythmically, and it seemed to him endlessly, in the lonely twilit lanes. They seemed to be beating in his brain and confusing his thoughts. The solid edifice which his intellect had built up carefully, stage by stage, and on which that mood of lofty resignation had put the coping stone, seemed to him no more than a house on paper, an empirical design, lacking the test of reality.

But he clung obstinately to it. He had seen clearly, and acted on his vision, rightly. Only his feelings were waking again, and battling against his will. It

would always be so. The struggle had not ended with surrender. It would go on for ever, and there would never come a time when heart as well as brain would tell him that he had done right. He must set his teeth and cling to the truth as he had once seen it, even when it seemed to him most false.

The steady beat of iron on stone changed its tune. It was no longer confusing; it rang out with irresistible purpose; hour by hour, day by day, year by year going forward, even against the will to turn aside.

He caught at this new mood, and stayed his mind with it, and as he did so came to the road leading to the mill. Across the hedges and the moonlit meadows the roofs and chimneys and the tall poplars showed dark against the sky. A yellow light shone from an upper window, and instantly he turned his horse's head towards it. The horse, as if consciously accepting his symbolical rôle, would have disobeyed the rein and kept straight on, but his master's determination, unreasoning, but all powerful, drove him aside after the briefest of struggles.

The lane opened out into a wide space. It was bounded on one side by the dark irregular length of the house, crowned by that beacon window. There was a smaller curtained window beneath it, showing a perpendicular blade of light. At right angles to the house was a row of buildings, and from a hollow shadow at the end of them emerged a tall bent man, in clothes that seemed to be specially irradiated by the moon. It was the miller's man, of whom Margaret had spoken to him

once, in the lost days of their happiness, a man of abysmal taciturnity, who fed deep thoughts in a floury solitude, but never uttered them. He came forward and took Hugh's horse without a word, as if he had been awaiting him, and led it away.

Hugh went through a little garden to a door by the side of the curtained window. There was no bell, and no knocker, and he opened it straightway, and fell back for a moment in surprise. He was in a large low black-raftered room. A cavernous hearth faced him. To his left was a small curtained window, but at the end of the room was another long latticed window, open to the night, and beneath it an oak table at which, with a great book in front of him, and a shaded lamp, sat an old man with white hair and a long white beard, gravely regarding him.

For an appreciable space of time he stood with his hand on the door and looked at the old man, who made no sign either of surprise or welcome. Then he shut the door, and instantly the silence broke into bewildering noise and movement. For when he turned around again Margaret was in the room and in his arms, crying to him and her grandfather, the old man had turned in his seat, and Hugh was speaking wildly to him and comforting her at the same time.

The confusion died down as suddenly as it had arisen. Confronted by that figure of wise and placid age, whom this sudden cataclysm of feeling had moved to no more than a slight change of position, who spoke no word, but looked at them with inscrutable eyes,

waiting on them, the stress of emotion faded and left them facing him calmly.

"I want her for my wife," said Hugh, in a voice that did not sound like his own. "I come to ask you for her."

A thin waxlike hand lay on the book in front of the old man, and moved deliberately up and down. Otherwise he was motionless, except for his clear eyes, set under a white pent-house, which he now turned slowly upon the girl.

"Yes," she cried to him, "I want him, grandfather. Oh, I thought I could give him up; but it is too hard for me."

Again the steady slow-moving gaze rested on Hugh. He obeyed it as if it had been spoken word. "I am Hugh Lelacheur," he said. "We met by chance—more than a week ago. I love her, and you see that she loves me."

The steadfast gaze still rested on him, but the girl broke in. She was clinging to his arm. They stood in the middle of the room, under a heavy beam. "We love each other so dearly, grandfather. And he is so good, but his life has been unhappy."

The searching eyes had not moved from Hugh's face. He was impelled to clear statements. "We met by chance," he said again. "I was painting. We came to love each other almost before we knew of it. I want your permission to marry your granddaughter."

He would not speak of the obstacle that had come between them until he was obliged. It was no obstacle

to him. But the old man was still unsatisfied. He spoke at last in a low clear voice.

"What else is there to tell?" he asked.

Again the girl interposed. "He told me this afternoon," she said, twisting her fingers together, "of—another, whom he was to have married. I said it came between us, and we said good-bye. But I can't live without him, dear grandfather. When I heard the wheels just now, and saw him come in I came straight to him. He is mine. You won't tell him to leave me?"

The clear eyes rested on Hugh now, as it seemed to him with a look of displeasure.

"It is true," he said, "that I was to have married another woman. I have never loved her, but my life was very lonely. Now I know what love is I see that it was wrong to engage myself to her. I'm sorry. It was my fault. Margaret has forgiven me for it now." He drew her to him. "It won't come between us."

"It frightened me," pleaded the girl. "It seemed to put us far apart when he told me this afternoon. But if we love each other so much as we do, we shall forget it."

The old man looked at her now. "You can never forget it, my child," he said. "You have no right to forget it. What does your faith teach you? Love is a sacred thing, and marriage is a sacrament. This man has put it out of his power to offer you marriage: he has given his word to another. The Church teaches you that."

Hugh's anger rose, and an inherited Protestant intolerance. Were the rules of a Church he disliked to be brought up against him now? "You can't argue that seriously," he said sharply. "She shall practise her own religion without interference from me."

The old man looked at him with steady eyes. "We speak a different language," he said quietly. "I am not in reconciliation with the Church, but there are real things in life which she has rightly interpreted—things which Protestantism leaves alone. This is one of them." He turned to the girl. "My child," he said, "your instinct was right. The blame of loving does not rest with you"—he threw a sudden minatory glance at Hugh—"but as soon as you were told of this previous contract, it was for you to crush the love in your breast." His voice rose, and his hands shot forward and clutched the air in a vigorous gesture. For a moment he was all fire. Then he sank again into motionless placidity.

The girl drew her hands away from Hugh, hid her face in them, and moaned.

"It isn't right," Hugh cried. "You are taking away her happiness—and mine—for a mere rule. We should help each other to all goodness. If ever there was a love sent from God, this is. It is spiritual and pure. You can't allow a mistake of mine to wreck two lives. I will mend it as far as I can. You don't know the circumstances. I can make it up to——"

"You rest on your wealth," interrupted the old man. "That is a mean thought. You do not know how the

minds of those of our faith work. Margaret, it rests with you."

Hugh turned to her, and began to plead his love passionately. She still hid her face with her hands, and made little sounds of pain as she listened to him. Her grandfather sat in the light of the lamp, like some silent inexorable judge, relying on the law and the strength of the law, having stated it, scorning to plead its cause. But the struggle went on between the three of them, momentous, in the quiet dimly lit room, while outside brooded the silent summer night over miles of sleeping country.

The girl raised her head slowly. Her eyes were full of pain. She looked at Hugh with infinite tenderness and longing, hiding nothing of her love for him; but against that look his pleading died down into bald ineffective sentences, and ended in silence.

She came to him and put her hands on his shoulders and lifted her face to his. "Good-bye, my dearest," she said. He kissed her gently, and looked for a long time into her eyes. The old man sat silent at the table, his thin hand rising and falling on the page of his book. The clock's tick became audible; the breath of the night stole through the casement. Hugh kissed her again, and then turned and left the house.

CHAPTER XX

MARRIAGE

Hugh travelled up to London early the next morning. He was his old self once again, cold and self-contained, with a clear outlook on life, from which every vestige of glamour had departed. He thrust the pain deep into his heart and thought closely of all that it behoved him to do to bury his week's madness. When he thought of Mabilia and her mother he had to choke down a kind of cold anger, which possessed him unreasonably. He would go to them at once, but he would neither excuse nor explain. It would need constant restraint to hide his resentment against them. In keeping his word, and concealing what it had cost him to keep it, the limits of complacency would be reached, and they must find their satisfaction in discussing with each other the change in him, for he would suffer no discussion with himself. With regard to them his course was plain.

It was not so easy to decide other things. What would come in the future from the echoes of his vanished dream? It was impossible, in the cold light of remembrance, to believe that the secret was still his. He recalled the sidelong looks of his servants, the undisguised bewilderment of his agent, the rebuffing of country neighbours. Even now they must be discussing

his behaviour and preparing the ground for the seed of disclosure that must presently spread all over the countryside. The fields and woods about the mill were unfrequented. He had never seen a soul in them when once he had left the borders of his own park. But it was too much to expect that he, in whom so much interest centred, had been unmarked in his comings and goings. There would be gossip of servants, gossip of villagers, tracking his movements, and sooner or later the truth would come out and he would be held up to the scorn of men.

Well, he would not run away. He would face it out. What would it matter—for his own sake? If only he could have shielded her from obloquy there might have been a dark satisfaction, even, in braving it himself. But her share in the punishment that would come was beyond his power to lessen. That side of the question would not bear thinking of. He set his teeth and made his determination. He would live at Wyse Hall and take up the responsibilities to which he had been called. He would wrap himself close in his cloak of reserve, first against Mabilia and her mother, then against his neighbours, so that when the truth should become known the remnants of his pride might be preserved to him in the face of open reproach or cold avoidance. He would have no joy in life ever again. He would make the best of what still remained.

As he drove to his rooms in the distant west of London, his mind, numbed by conflict and a sleepless night, dwelt idly on trivial matters, but he had no

sooner reached them than his wretchedness arose and stabbed him. The familiar surroundings spoke insistently to him of the fluttering pleasure that the thought of his emancipation had brought when he had last stood within them. And they told of the years of quiet emotionless existence that had gone before. Compared to the darkness in which he was henceforward to walk, the twilight of those past days seemed radiant with content and tranquility.

He ate something standing, and went straight to Mrs. Churton's house. He was shown into the drawing-room, where she and Mabilia were together. The maid who conducted him upstairs cast a wondering glance at his lined gloomy face. Mrs. Churton's first exclamation was one of surprise at his altered appearance. "Why, you must have been ill!" she cried. "Why on earth didn't you tell us? And what in the world have you been doing all this time?"

"I am not ill," he said, shaking hands with her and afterwards with Mabilia.

"Then, please explain yourself," said Mrs. Churton in a voice to which policy lent an air of badinage. "Not a line to me or Mabilia! Seriously, you know, Hugh, it has put us in a very awkward position."

"I think you owe me some explanation," added Mabilia, with hauteur.

"I have none to give," he said, frowning impatiently.

Mabilia and her mother stared at one another. An

air of alarm mixed itself with the air of outraged offence which they had prepared for him.

"I am afraid you must have been ill, Hugh," said Mrs. Churton, in a more subdued tone. "But I will not worry you about it, if you won't admit it. Only, of course, Mabilia has been anxious. You have not treated her very well, I think."

"I am used to the treatment," said Mabilia bitterly. "I suppose now that Hugh has come into a title and a fortune he is sorry that he became engaged to me."

A spasm of anger took him. "That is what I should expect you to think," he said roughly.

Mrs. Churton rose from her chair. "I will leave you together," she said. "Your actions have nothing to do with me, Hugh, except as to Mabilia's happiness, but I am not used to being treated in this way." And she sailed out of the room. Hugh opened the door for her. It was a relief to be able to do something. When, in the train, he had thought over what he would not say to them, it had not occurred to him to decide what he would say. He found the task almost insupportably difficult.

"What is the matter with you, Hugh?" asked Mabilia, when they were alone. "Why do you treat me like this?"

"There is nothing the matter with me," he said. "Please don't keep harping on that." He made a great effort to behave as if his words were true. Rudeness and irritation would not put him into the position he wished to occupy before Mabilia and her mother.

"Wyse Hall is a fine place," he said. "It is full of beautiful things. We will go there when we come home from Switzerland."

Mabilia's resentment merged itself in a mild excitement. "I have read about it," she said. "It is a show place. I should like you to take me there soon, Hugh."

"I shall be busy in London until we are married," he said shortly.

"But you can spare a day or two. There will be things to see to if we are to live there."

"There is nothing to see to. My cousin lived there up to the time he left England. All the servants have stayed on. We could go and live there tomorrow without making fresh arrangements."

"Then we can easily go down for a few days. Mother would like to see the place, I know."

"We will go there when we come back from Switzerland," he said again. "I shall not leave London until we are married."

Resentment rose in her again. "Why do you take this extraordinary tone with me?" she asked. "What have I done? What has come over you? Are my wishes to count for nothing? There is nearly a month before the wedding, and everything is ready. I want to go and see the place where I am to live. Why can't you take me?"

He could bear no more. Every word she spoke jarred on him. He could not trust himself to look at her. He rose from his seat and said coldly: "I do not

choose to take you until we are married. Let us have no more words about it."

She sprang up from her seat too. "You are behaving like a brute," she cried. "What on earth has come over you? Are you doing this because you want to get rid of me, now you have everything else you want?"

An impulse came over him to tell her brutally how much he wanted to get rid of her. He crushed it down. "You must excuse me," he said quietly, with a return to his normal self. "I did not sleep last night. I will go home now. Good-bye, Mabilia."

"Hugh," she said, in alarm, "you are not going to break with me?"

He smiled bitterly. "You need not be afraid of that," he said. "You shall have more than you bargained for in marrying me. But you will do as I wish. Good-bye."

He turned and left the room without further farewell. Mabilia stood where he had left her, in utter perplexity.

The few weeks before the wedding went by. Hugh immersed himself in business with his lawyer and with his agent, whom he summoned up to town. Mr. Gillett no longer found him averse to going into details of estate management. He wanted to know everything, and showed plainly that he meant to take the reins in earnest. "What has come over him?" the agent and the lawyer asked of one another, and hinted that his head

had been turned by his sudden change of fortune. But it was a curious turning of the head. He showed no pleasure in his possessions, lived on in his rooms at Earl's Court, was never sociable, but kept them at arm's length and talked of nothing but business.

Mrs. Churton's friends, some of whom he had been unable altogether to escape, although he had asked that, on the regular occasions of his coming to the house, he should not have to meet other people, tapped their foreheads significantly. Dear Mabilia might think herself lucky to have caught a rich baronet—at her age—but, for their part, they would be sorry to have to marry such a man, as glum as a bear, and so stuck up that nobody was good enough for him. *He* did not seem to think himself very lucky. What a face for a prospective bridegroom! They only hoped, for dear Mabilia's sake, that there would be no catastrophe before the wedding. When once she was Lady Lelacheur they supposed she would be satisfied. She might even be relieved to be rid of him, if, as seemed very likely, he should have to be—well, put away.

Mrs. Churton and Mabilia seriously thought that Hugh's brain was affected. In some roundabout way they had got into communication with Wyse Hall, and heard that while he had been there he had insisted upon being alone all day, and spent his time wandering about, pretending to paint. The sudden shock, they put it down to. And people in that state of mind often showed delusions—such as an unaccountable dislike to their nearest and dearest. It was painful, of course, but in

all other respects he was as sane as they were. And there were compensations. Under the circumstances they did not press him to come to the house more often than he showed a desire to—which was three times a week, as before. They were happier without him, buying a trousseau on an enlarged scale, and drawing pictures for the benefit of their friends, and themselves.

They were meek in Hugh's presence. His brain must not be excited by contradiction. They must put up with all his fads—until after the wedding; and some of them were not easy to put up with. It was difficult to find a satisfactory reason for Mabilia's never having seen the stately house over which she was to reign. But they managed it somehow, and warded off persistent curiosity by warm invitations to visit at Wyse Hall and view Mabilia's glory. "We will fill the house with pleasant people, my dear," said Mrs. Churton, taking it, perhaps not unnaturally, for granted that, as she had been willing to share her own goods with her daughter and son-in-law, she would now be assigned a like share in theirs. Mabilia doubted whether the house would ever be filled with pleasant people of the sort that her mother had in mind, or even whether Mrs. Churton herself would be made entirely welcome there. But she kept these doubts to herself, and held before her the tangible assets of her coming marriage.

They were married on the day that had been appointed many weeks before. Mabilia, in orange blossoms and a gown of ivory satin, gained plaudits. The bride-

groom was dignified and reserved, as became him, but it could not be said that he was cordial to the guests who thronged the church and the reception at Mrs. Churton's house—nor was it said, but very much the reverse, although he behaved with less eccentricity than had been expected of him, indeed, with no eccentricity at all. His best man was a former colleague at the insurance office. The Kynastons were the only other personal friends of his present. To them alone he showed cordiality, but they shook their heads as they journeyed back to their office in the Strand, by the Underground Railway. "Lelacheur was the last man I should have said would be altered by prosperity," said Kynaston; but his wife thought he was not making a happy marriage.

Sir Hugh and Lady Lelacheur, announced the papers, the latter in a dress of biscuit-coloured cloth, left for Dover on their way to the Continent. They were away for a month, and kept to the most frequented places. This suited Mabilia admirably. She liked to sail into a crowded hotel dining-room, and to see the heads of the diners approach one another while their eyes followed her. She liked to talk affably to middle-class compatriots on terraces, in gardens, and in steamboats, and sniff the incense of their middle-class awe of her title. And the last thing she desired was to be alone with her husband. He was now always gravely polite to her, and her fear of mental disturbance had disappeared. But he kept up the barrier between them. She bore his name but shared none of his thoughts. They were

greater strangers to one another than they had been a year before on the moors and the cliff top and by the sea. He would leave her for a whole day at a time and take lonely walks in solitude. She was relieved that he should do so. Her fear when they had set out on their journey was lest he should take her to lonely places, such as she knew he loved, and that she would have no companionship but his. The month during which they were abroad was supportable, but she wished it ended. She wanted to get back to England and to Wyse Hall.

They reached home on a day of mellow September sunshine. As they drove from the station, in all the state that years before had aroused Admiral Lelacheur's wrath, Mabilia felt at last that she was rewarded for all she had gone through from her husband, who sat silent and gloomy by her side. His feelings towards her were perhaps softer than they had ever been. She was coming into her kingdom, as he had come into his three months ago. What could she, with her narrow nature, know of the rapture that had filled his life only a few short weeks before? It was enough for her that she was going to live in a great house and would be looked up to as a lady of rank. He would give her everything he could to bring her contentment. Fortunately she did not want what he could not give her—his confidence and the thoughts of his heart.

They drove in through the entrance gates and across the park. He had given instructions that, owing to the tragedy that had preceded his succession, there was to

be no formal welcome from his tenants and dependants. They came to the old house, lying still and beautiful beneath the evening sky. Mabilia affected a stately indifference. She was playing her part. But her eyes showed her appreciation. The new chapter was opened.

CHAPTER XXI

POSSESSIONS

Wyse Church stood on the slope of a gentle rise in a corner of the park, perhaps half-a-mile from the house. It was backed by a grove of beech, and faced a road leading to a lodge gate, upon the other side of which lay the village. It was very old and very quiet, far enough from the boundary of the park to keep it in seclusion on week days, near enough to draw its village congregation on Sundays. It had been restored by Sir Richard Lelacheur, and the interior had lost that appearance of great age which might have been expected from the heavy stones and Norman arches of the outside, and had before been suggested by its worm-eaten high pews, Jacobean altar table and ugly faded upholstery, even though these at one time had been glaring innovations, compared with which the later restoration had been quite innocuous. The old squire's pew in the chancel had been replaced by an organ and a vestry, and the two front rows of oak benches in the nave had been substituted for it. There was a reredos and an altar with elaborate hangings. A low carved pulpit had replaced the old three-decker. The carved and painted fifteenth-century rood-screen had not been touched, but there was already a proposal on foot to restore it in memory of Sir Richard and his family.

The old brasses to knightly Lelacheurs of the long-distant past still lay on the pavements of chancel and nave. A big window of plain glass, scattered with armorial bearings, still afforded glimpses of the sky at the east end, and was a great eyesore to the Rector. And no improvements had availed to banish from the church, the floor of which was two steps lower than the ground outside, the penetrating smell which belongs to ancient stone-built places.

It had been the custom of the villagers, coming by twos and threes along the park road and converging footpaths, to linger in the churchyard and about the lych-gate until the family from the Hall had arrived and entered the porch, when they would troop in behind them, nailed boots ringing unabashed on stone floors, and take their places for the service, which would immediately afterwards begin.

It was upon this assembly that Hugh and Mabilia came, on the Sunday morning after their home-coming. Mabilia stepped out of her carriage, and walked up the churchyard path and into the church between a double row of her husband's tenants, who stared at her with undisguised curiosity, of which, although her eyes looked in front of her, she was agreeably aware. It was, perhaps, the culmination of her triumph. She was a great lady, an acknowledged queen in this little corner of the world, surrounded by none who would not acknowledge her greatness. She could not conceal a smile of gratification as she walked up the church and knelt in her seat, but there was nothing in front of her

but the chancel and the altar, and it was marked by none of her fellow-worshippers.

Hugh followed her, his face set and inscrutable. He had been nerving himself to this moment, his first public appearance among his neighbours. His eyes were watchful, though none could have said that they met them. He thought he saw whisperings and strange looks, and hugged more closely his cloak of pride. He watched for a glance from the clergyman, who took his place at the reading desk inside the screen. He got it, and did not know whether it meant outraged bewilderment or merely natural curiosity. He tried to analyze the stares of the school children and the few villagers who formed the choir, but he could make nothing of them. He waited for the sermon, suspected a hidden application in the text and condemnation in a score of platitudinous sentences which followed. He even looked askance at the hymns and read them through as the tunes were being played over.

Mabilia, standing, kneeling, and sitting beside him, was occupied with far different thoughts, into which her husband's figure rarely intruded, although it stood in the background, slightly readjusted in her mind. She went through the service in a glow of satisfaction and what stood to her for happiness.

It was all far more splendid and rooted than she had imagined. The house alone—she had visualized it as "a show place," and read what she could find to read of its glories. She had enjoyed, in a way, the prospect of living in a house which people were allowed

to come and gape at, but she had told her friends that the drawbacks would counterbalance the advantage. "What is the good of having a queen's bedroom that you cannot sleep in?" she had asked, "and a ball-room and saloons and picture galleries and all the rest of it, that you don't want to use, besides collections of priceless pictures and plate and china and furniture which are only an anxiety? I don't want to live in a museum. I would much rather have a house like the Dickson-Ponders', where *all* the rooms are used and everything is comfortable and just as it should be." Her friends had sympathized with her before her face and laughed at her behind her back.

The splendid house, of which she had hardly as yet gained more than an impression, rose up before her, with its old and priceless treasures heightening the beauty of spacious rooms, all adapted to the easy modern life of its owners. Her husband's predecessors had used every room in it for their large family and many friends. Here was a state of which she had had no previous experience, but it was subordinated to the pleasure and comfort of those who had held it. The picture with which Mabilia warmed her heart during the progress of the service was a jumble of magnificent rooms of state, and smaller ones as fine in their beautiful plenishing; crowds of servants, watchful, soft-footed, with no obtrusive personalities to disturb the perfection of their service; fires everywhere; everything made ready; an effect of careless wealth and splendid ostentation which, somehow, was not ostentation at

all. This was like no "show place" that she had ever dreamt of, with ancient magnificence sharply cut off from daily life, although in its spoils of beauty it could hold its own with any. Nor was it in the least like the Dickson-Ponders' lavishly furnished modern castle, hitherto the pattern of opulent comfort, but now vulgar and ostentatiously extravagant. She had caught the same note and felt herself born to it.

And there was another source of gratified pride. She had hugged her new title as a pleasant plaything, but her husband's family had meant little or nothing to her. It was well that he was a baronet, but she would much rather have married a peer of no ancestry whatever. But now, with a mind quick to form such impressions, she stood with him at the end of a line of such old distinction, both in wealth and place, that the baronetcy became a mere incident in the tale of achievement. At her feet was the brass of a Lelacheur who had been Knight of the Garter long before the families of most existing peers had been heard of; there was a crusader's tomb in a niche of the south wall, a battered helmet and long two-handled sword opposite to it. Every monument and pane of coloured glass in the church told some tale from the history of the same ancient family, and the house was full of memorials of its long-dead members: armour and banners and robes, portraits and parchments, with countless personal possessions, still freely used, cementing the sober present with the long and glorious past. Her husband's apparent indifference to all these things was the right

attitude. You did not talk about your ancestry when you were so highly placed as this. You hugged it in secret. So, at least, thought Mabilia, and considered ways of making the secret known and at the same time preserving a voiceless pride. It would go hard with her if she did not find abundant satisfaction in a life with such trappings. Lady Lelacheur of Wyse Hall was a greater personage than ever she had imagined, and Mabilia Lelacheur was well fitted for such eminence.

After the service was over, when the vicar had left the chancel, the rest of the congregation remained in their places. It was Mabilia who divined that she and Hugh were expected to lead the way out of church, and they walked down the aisle between the benches with every eye fixed upon them.

"We will wait for the vicar, and you had better ask him to lunch," Hugh said to his wife. She got into the carriage and he waited by the gate while the villagers passed him on their homeward way. He shook hands with Gillett and introduced him to Mabilia, and spoke to one or two to whom Gillett had made him known on the first day of his arrival. They were mostly awkward in their acknowledgments of his words, but he could not discover in their speech any signs of what he feared, and Gillett talked easily, although in rather more subdued a manner than at first.

The vicar came down the path rather hurriedly. He was a man of forty-five, a bachelor, half priestly, half bucolic, with a thin shaven face, an old soft felt hat and

thick nailed boots. He had called on Hugh twice two months before and had not seen him. He was evidently nervous, as he looked up at his patron from beneath a pair of bushy eyebrows. Hugh shook hands with him and said: "I was sorry not to see you when I came down before." His nervousness subsided, and he became voluble, over-friendly, accepted Mabilia's invitation with alacrity, and got into the carriage with them. He could have heard nothing.

The country neighbours called. They thought Mabilia very well, but inclined to be patronizing, at which some of them laughed and others took offence. Those of them who saw Hugh, compared him unfavourably with Sir Richard. "They say he is eccentric," they said. "Neither of them is a great acquisition." Hugh read their faces keenly.

He asked some of them to shoot his partridges with him. If he had been capable of enjoying anything he would have enjoyed the clear days of September and October, standing under the thinning hedgerows, tramping across roots and stubble. He had not fired a cartridge since his boyhood's days, but was proficient enough not to disgrace himself. He learned the secrets of driving the birds to and fro, posted the guns himself and brooked no dictation from his own keeper. Sir Richard's favourite retriever attached herself to him and would fetch and carry for no one else.

One morning when it was suggested that the fields round Paston's mill should be driven he acquiesced, but

before the guns came to them he pleaded a headache and went home.

He spent most of his mornings with Gillett in his business-room or in the estate office. The agent told the vicar that he learnt everything with extraordinary quickness, and had an eye for every detail. But he did not like him. After dinner he would sit in the long library. When Mabilia was with him he read; when she had gone to bed he sat and looked in front of him.

One lovely morning, early in October, Mabilia proposed that they should go out sketching. "There is a most picturesque old mill," she said. "I have seen it from the road. It would make a charming picture."

"You are not to go near it," he said roughly, and when she exclaimed, in aggrieved astonishment, added: "It does not belong to me. You must go nowhere but on my own land."

"Oh, very well," she said. "But there could not be much harm. Where shall we go?"

"I'm not coming," he said. "I have work to do."

Mabilia sometimes went sketching while the fine weather lasted, but Hugh never, from the time of their marriage.

As the weeks went on his apprehension died away. There had been no sign, no word, no looks of meaning from his own servants or from the people he met in church or village or country lane. It seemed incredible that no one should have seen him near the waters of the mill, since he had frequented them day after day with no efforts towards concealment. But it must have been

so. He knew that his servants had attributed his long absences and his disregard of business and correspondence to eccentricity. Probably they had welcomed a more usual mode of life as the result of his marriage, for there was now no echo of past mistrust in their demeanour.

One day, after he had told himself at last that the secret of those days was his own, he said something to Gillett about the mill and the land around it. "Old Paston is as tough as an oak," said Gillett. "He's over seventy, but he may live to a hundred, and last out you and me. He lives all alone now. His granddaughter has gone away again." Hugh said no more. He had heard her name mentioned. Before that she might have been living on the other side of the world instead of at his doors, for all he had heard of her since they had parted. She had never been seen about the village, and was regarded by the villagers as part of the enigma, which they had long since tired of trying to solve, in the life of her grandfather.

But at the beginning of the new year her name suddenly forced itself upon every pair of ears within a radius of twenty miles.

The vicar came one afternoon to drink tea with Mabilia. It was one of his chief pleasures in life. To him she was the type of aristocratic graciousness, a figure more imposing than Lady Victoria Lelacheur, Sir Richard's wife, who had had, it is true, more easy manners, and had displayed no condescension to him, but had shown a most feminine distaste for village gos-

sip. Mabilia patronized him, and he accepted her patronage as a mark of her breeding, but she also turned a willing ear to the tittle-tattle with which he regaled her. This combination of qualities, pointed by the rich surroundings of Wyse Hall, pleased his palate, and he questered like a hound for food to supply them.

He came hurrying up the drive from his vicarage in the village street, and inquired for Lady Lelacheur with such eagerness that the butler who opened the door to him was impelled to remark to his underling that there was something in the wind, and old Hobnails had been the first to sniff it out, as usual.

Hugh was in his wife's morning-room, which occasioned the messenger of tidings some embarrassment, for he was not at ease with his patron, and found little to admire in the pride of the husband, however much it might please him in the wife.

"Such a piece of news!" he said, accepting a cup of tea from Mabilia's hand, with a side glance at Hugh, standing upright in front of the fire. "Have you ever set eyes on the old man at Paston's mill, Sir Hugh?"

Hugh had begun to relax his vigilance. The announcement of news, which would have steeled him for anything that might follow, a month ago, had conveyed no warning to him, and his face went white. But the vicar, having asked his question, had looked down upon his tea-cup again and Mabilia's eyes were not raised. He put strong constraint upon himself, took a sip of his tea before replying, and then said "No," in a voice

which sounded strange to him, but brought no notice from the others.

"No; well, I'm not surprised," said the vicar. "He is a hermit, and gossip says a miser as well. He has lived in that house for, let me see—how many years?"

"Pray tell us your news, Mr. Hobnell," said Mabilia leaning back in her chair and fingering her bracelet; "one hears little enough, nowadays."

The vicar made haste to get rid of his budget. "Paston has a granddaughter," he began, and again Hugh's eyelids quivered. "Nobody has ever seen her, hardly. In fact, she has been abroad until quite lately. Well now, what do we hear? All of a sudden, and nobody knowing anything about it, she's gone away and got married."

Hugh put his cup down on the table, and turned round to poke the fire. His action merely seemed to indicate the same indifference as his wife's, "Well, I don't see anything very extraordinary in that," she said.

"Ah! but wait a minute. If she were marrying a stranger—well and good! But who do you think the happy bridegroom is?"

"How on earth can I tell?" said Mabilia disdainfully.

"A man old enough to be her father, her grandfather, almost. A man in a much better position than hers. A clergyman—in fact, Mr. Freeling, the Rector of Swathling!"

He brought out his statements with progressive emphasis, and looked triumphantly for their result.

"How tiresome!" said Mabilia languidly. "I suppose she will hardly expect me to call on her?"

"Oh, they are not going——" began the vicar, but Hugh interrupted sharply: "Mr. Freeling never called upon you. There is nothing tiresome in it. You will let them alone."

Mabilia raised her eyebrows, and flushed with annoyance. "I shall certainly leave them alone," she said. "In fact, I cannot see that your news is of the slightest interest, Mr. Hobnell."

The vicar showed himself pathetically confused by this reception. "I thought you'd like to hear of it," he said. "Nobody else knows, yet. I had it from the Bishop's chaplain, whom I saw this morning. It's not usual, an elderly clergyman marrying the daughter of a miller."

"Well, of course, it is rather odd," admitted Mabilia handsomely. There was no need to ask questions. The vicar would tell her everything. But she would prefer to let him reveal himself undisturbed by her husband's presence. She looked up at Hugh. His set and frowning face betrayed no more to her than an habitual moroseness, to which she was becoming habituated, but which none the less aroused resentment. "I don't suppose you care to listen to village gossip, Hugh," she said. "Mr. Hobnell is kind enough to regale me with it. It relieves the dulness a trifle."

"When did this marriage take place?" asked Hugh, taking no notice of his wife.

"Some days ago," replied the vicar, livening up a little at this mark of interest. "Freeling is a queer character. None of us see much of him. Swathling is a big church in a tiny parish, and he never sets foot outside it, *except*—and that has always been remarked—to come and see old Paston, at the mill. Paston is said to be a Roman Catholic. He's probably much nearer an atheist, as no one has ever heard of his going to Mass; and I don't believe Freeling is much better. I should be very sorry to ask him to preach in my church, or to officiate in his. It's nothing but a great empty barn, and he's never done anything to beautify it. They say he educated this girl at a convent in France, and the gossip has always been, though I never listened to it, that he meant to marry her sooner or later. Now, of course, one sees that there was something in it. I don't know what sort of a girl she is, because I've never seen her."

"Then you can leave her name out of the discussion," said Hugh sharply. "I will leave you to talk it over with my wife."

He walked down the long room towards the door, but as he reached it something was said which caused him to turn round, with his fingers on the handle.

"And I hope the new rector will be an improvement on the old."

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I was telling Lady Lelacheur, Sir Hugh," said the

vicar, raising his voice, "that the Bishop's chaplain told me that Mr. Freeling has exchanged his living for one in Devonshire, so we shall not have the pleasure of seeing anything of the miller's daughter turned parson's wife."

Hugh went out of the room and into his own study, and locked the door after him.

. . . . . .

Early in the spring Mabilia went to London to stay with her mother for a fortnight. Hugh had never left Wyse Hall since they had come to it in September. He had let his house in Grosvenor Square again, having curtly refused Mabilia's request that they might occupy it themselves during the London season. "I shall never live in London," he said. "If you want to go there you can stay with Mrs. Churton, or at an hotel." And Mabilia had clutched at a respite from a life that had already become insupportably dull to her.

Mrs. Churton had also found Wyse Hall intolerably dull when she had visited her daughter in November, and again for a week at Christmas. Mabilia's grandeur afforded her small gratification, since none of her own friends were permitted to see it, and she gained more satisfaction from describing than from observing it. Mabilia's grandeur had, in fact, aroused in Mrs. Churton some annoyance. She had no objection, she told herself, to her daughter's giving herself airs, generally, but it was a little too much to expect that she should be expected to put up with them herself. Mabilia was a great lady, no doubt, and airs, to Mrs. Churton, were

a natural expression of greatness; but Mabilia's was not the only fine house that was open to her, and if she was to be made to feel that she was there on sufferance, well, she would go elsewhere, or else stop at home. It was not Hugh's treatment of her that she resented. He refused to have Mabilia's former friends in the house, but his welcome of her had been almost cordial. She had found a great improvement in him, especially on the occasion of her second visit. He no longer seemed to be in arms against her, and if he was still morose at times, and behaved rather like a bear to his wife, Mrs. Churton could not find it in her heart to blame him, considering Mabilia's absurd ways and discontented petulance.

Mrs. Churton had written that she should be glad to have Mabilia with her as long as it pleased her to stay, but she had made up her mind, as she wrote, that there should be no airs in *her* house. She had been a good mother to Mabilia, and given her everything that it was in her power to give. She would treat Lady Lelacheur in the same way as she had treated Mabilia Churton, no better and no worse. If she cared to make herself happy for a time in her mother's house, and among her old friends, it should be on those conditions. The airs must be kept for the friends, upon whom Mrs. Churton had exercised a few herself.

Mabilia brought a maid and a great stock of clothes, which she proposed further to increase, for she had a handsome allowance from her husband and money in addition from her mother. She compared the size of

the bedroom that was assigned to her with her own at Wyse Hall, and remarked on the general pokiness of the house. Mrs. Churton, whose heart was hot within her, waited, and, during the course of the afternoon and evening, gathered further material for displeasure.

The outburst came when Mabilia announced her intention of breakfasting in her bedroom.

"No," snapped out Mrs. Churton, the word coming like a pistol crack. Mabilia stared at her.

"You are not an invalid," said Mrs. Churton, "breakfast is at half-past nine in the dining-room, and you will come down to it as you have always done, if you want any breakfast at all."

"I always breakfast in my own apartments at home," began Mabilia; but her mother broke in on her.

"Your only apartments here," she said, with an inflection of contempt on the word used, "besides your own bedroom, are the rooms which you will share with me. I have had enough of it, Mabilia. If you condescend to come and stay in this house you will please to behave yourself. If your own mother and your own mother's house are not good enough for you, by all means go and stay somewhere else. You may be my lady to the rest of the world; to me you are my daughter, Mabilia."

The somewhat acrid discussion that followed ended in Mabilia's breaking into tears and saying that she had no wish to quarrel with her mother, who was the only friend she had in the world. "I am absolutely miserable," she said. "I have got everything I thought

I wanted, and I don't care for any of it. Hugh never speaks a kind word to me, and he keeps me in that great house just like a prisoner. I am beginning to hate it."

"It is the sort of prison that most people would be very glad to have," said Mrs. Churton uncompromisingly, "and it seems to me that you have no difficulty in getting away from it when you wish to. As for Hugh never speaking a kind word to you, I have not heard you speak many kind words to him. He seems to me to be greatly improved from what he was immediately before his marriage. There is no sign any longer of what we feared then, and if he is cold towards you, I expect it is because you do not give him what he wants."

"There is one thing I know he wants," said Mabilia, in a low voice, drying her tears on a lace handkerchief.

"He wants an heir, of course," said Mrs. Churton frankly.

"It is not an heir so much. I believe he would rather have a daughter than a son. I believe he never forgets that child of his sister's."

"I thought he had put that old trouble away from him. He did not go down to Foyle at Christmas. Is he going at Easter?"

"How can I tell? I should no more venture to speak of those things to him than one of the under-footmen would."

"We have agreed to drop the under-footmen for the present. Of course, Mabilia, I acknowledge that your complaints are justified to a certain extent. Hugh cer-

tainly does not treat you with confidence, or even with affection."

"He treats me with absolute aversion. I believe he hates the very ground I walk on. His very politeness shows it, for he has changed again in the last month, mother. He will have his own way in everything, but he is not so irritable. He simply seems to take no pleasure in anything. And you know I was prepared to love him. I don't now. It would be impossible. But I believe if I did he would dislike it more than anything else."

"Well, it is certainly a strange state of things. Nobody put any pressure on him to marry you, and I don't believe it was for the sake of money, for you remember the attitude he took up about that. Mabilia, do you think there is another woman?"

"My dear mother, what an absurd idea! He knew nobody before we went to Wyse, and he never goes outside the place."

"Well, it does not seem likely. But he might behave just in the way he does, if it were so. It has sometimes occurred to me. Well, Mabilia, you have got a very fine house and a great position. You must content yourself with that. When you get tired of Wyse Hall —and I own that I should find it dull myself, living there all the year round—you can come here—that is, if you can content yourself with what I can offer you. Now I think we had better go to bed. You can tell Wallace to call you at half-past eight."

Hugh did not go down to Foyle at Easter. He

did not leave Wyse Hall for a night until he went abroad for a month at the beginning of June, leaving Mabilia to pay another visit to her mother, and display herself in the drawing-rooms of Earl's Court. Thereafter he always went abroad regularly at the beginning of June, alone, and sometimes again, later in the year, when Mabilia would occasionally accompany him. But as the years went on, Mabilia developed into something of an invalid, and kept more and more to her own rooms, where she received the visits of the vicar and a few of her country neighbours, embroidered altar cloths and vestments, and read novels and devotional poetry.

Hugh, in his big house, was as lonely as he had been in his two rooms at Earl's Court. His life was as busy as he could make it. He was unremitting in the business of his estate, and attended regularly to his duties as a magistrate. He made few friends among his fellow-landowners, but he was treated as a man of weight and judgment, and five years after his succession he was made Chairman of Quarter Sessions. A year or two later he was asked to stand for Parliament, as member for the division, but refused. In the autumn and winter he shot over his own land and sometimes over that of his neighbours. In the summer he paid some attention to his garden. Once or twice a month he and Mabilia, when she was not too unwell to accompany him, which was seldom, dined out at some big neighbouring house, and every now and again they gave a dinner in return, when they used the raftered ban-

queting hall, with its stone pavement, great open fireplace and carved and gilded minstrels' gallery, and the Lelacheur plate was displayed on table and buffet. In the evening he sat in the long library, set in hand a catalogue of its contents, and began to compile a history of his family, for which there was abundant material. He had the reputation among his tenants of a strict landlord, but there were stories of unexpected kindness, and village mothers defended him because he was known to notice their children.

CHAPTER XXII

MEMORIES

TEN years went by, and the month of June came round again. The meadows were once more deep in grass and flowers, and the profusion of midsummer was rioting over the rich level country around Wyse Hall. Mabilia was ill, and thought herself dangerously so. A doctor was in daily attendance, and two nurses waited on her querulous whims. She had so reproached her husband with his intention of leaving her in her dangerous state that he had given up his yearly Continental journey and stayed home. Always hitherto he had spent the month of June out of England. He sat with her for half-an-hour in the morning and half-an-hour in the afternoon, during which she often complained of the misery and dulness of her life, and did not refrain from accusing him of spoiling it. He was patient with her and silent under her upbraidings; and gentle, if he was able to do anything to relieve her restlessness. The doctor had told him that she was not seriously ill.

One afternoon Hugh left his wife's room and went out into the park. There was a light breeze which moved fleecy clouds across the soft blue of the sky. The bracken was pushing up bold croziers, the beeches wore their dress of tenderest green, the rabbits ran across the grass and the sandy ridges. His feet led him to that

part of the park which was bounded by the river, and when he came out into the fields he still continued to follow its windings by a path which he had not trodden for the ten years during which he had lived with Mabilia at Wyse Hall.

The lines on his face were deeper, and his hair was greyer. But he still walked with something of his old step; his body was thin, and improved in condition by years of a fairly active and open-air life. He was not noticeably different from the man who had trodden that path so lightly ten years before.

He was hardly, as yet, aware of where his steps were leading him. He had controlled his thoughts so that they seldom now tempted him to look back upon past years. He had set a bound, and for the sake of the poor contentment that remained to him forbidden them to wander.

He was thinking of Mabilia, and of whether there was any chance of increasing her happiness in the dull life she had chosen for herself. She had long since had freedom to go where she would, and he had even opened his house in London for her, and allowed her to entertain her acquaintances there. But she had tired of that, as well as of the Continental sojourns that she had next asked for, and for the last two years she had lived in her own rooms in Wyse Hall, and not for months left them, even to go into the garden. Had her marriage brought her anything at all that she really wanted? Would it not have been far better for her own sake if he had refused to carry it through?

For his own, there was only one answer. He had never known a moment's happiness or community of interest with her. They were bound together for life, but in sympathy as the poles asunder. The hope with which he had first buoyed himself up had died, of children to play about the rooms of his house, or comfort him with their dependence upon his love.

Some subtle influence of memory had impelled him, on this radiant day of June, to retrace steps both of mind and body. He raised his eyes and saw the never-to-be-forgotten summer fields around him, and the slow-moving flower-margined river; and his past life flowed back upon him with the strength and freshness of a day-old experience. He gave his thoughts the rein, and allowed them to take him where they would.

What had his life been since the door had shut on his brief dream of happiness? He had never willingly surveyed it as a whole. He had gone on from day to day, trying to forget, trying as far as he could to enjoy the good things of the world which fate had awarded him with so lavish a hand. The power of gratifying secondary desires might have brought him enough to be grateful for, if he had come to them from where he stood before the days of his dream. But there was the barrier. It was as if a veil through which he had hitherto looked upon the beauties of the world, without knowing that his vision was darkened by it, had suddenly been drawn aside and revealed them in unimagined radiance. The veil had fallen again, as suddenly as it had lifted, and its folds were thicker than before.

He came out on the bank of the mill-stream, and under the boughs of the great chestnut, older by ten years than when its leaves had last shaded him. It was all just the same. The pigeons cooed on the red roofs; the millwheel droned its lazy song; the poplars and the aspens quivered in the summer breeze; across the pool the orchard grasses stood thick under gnarled mossy trees; and there by the wooden staging under the bridge was moored a punt, leaky and shabby with age.

It all came back to him in a flash, the joy and the hidden but never buried sorrow. He threw himself on the grass and buried his face in his hands to shut out the sights and sounds that were all too familiar. Not one tone of her voice or turn of her head but came back to him. He lay for a long time stabbing his mind with thoughts intolerably sweet. His body shook as the waves of memory flowed over him.

His passion spent itself. He sat on the grass, on the very spot where she had sat by him on the day when he first saw and loved her. His sorrow ached dumbly at the back of his mind, and his tired thoughts roamed idly over detached and mostly unimportant episodes of his life.

It was summer time at Foyle. Anne had come into his room at dawn, and roused him. Together they had crept out of the house, and were standing on the edge of the little lake. It had rained in the night and the smell of the soil was sweet.

Again, it was winter, and they were reading together out of one book, both packed in great shabby easy-

chair by the schoolroom fire. The coal clinked in the grate. Anne had come to the end of a page and was ready to turn over. He held it with his finger until he had finished. Every now and again Anne put up her hand to brush the hair from her face, and the scent of it came to him.

They were on the sea with their father, who was steering, with Dunster at the sheets. The wind had sprung up suddenly, and the salt spray was wet on his cheeks and in a minute sparkling drops on Anne's blue jersey. They were both a little frightened, but the Admiral held on with a rugged steadfast face. There was nothing to fear while they were in his care.

He was trying to paint a cornfield on the slopes above the Manor, the shocks standing in serried rows with purple shadows, the grey down and the sky beyond. It was time to go home, but still he lingered, for he dreaded the lonely house. Anne had left him, the Admiral and Dunster were in London. The country was desolate under the hot August sun.

It was a chilly damp October evening. He was going through the gateway into the Great Court at Trinity. Lights from the Hall and the Master's Lodge shone warmly. The organ was booming in the Chapel. Two men in blue gowns came towards him laughing.

He was sitting in front of the fire in his father's rooms in London, reading "The Moonstone." The Admiral, with a rug across his knees, sat near him with his hands on the arm of his chair, a white stubble on his chin.

He was standing on the rung of a high stool, lifting a heavy ledger from the brass rails on a level with his head, carefully, so that it should not fall with a thud on his desk.

He was lunching with Kynaston at a confectioner's shop, both of them eating crisp rolls and drinking coffee from thick cups at a little marble-topped table.

He was in his snug room at Mrs. Millett's house, reading a letter from Anne, sitting at the table covered with a red cloth under a glaring gas jet. She had written of the brilliant sunshine, the hot plains, the verandah on which she was sitting in the shade, looking into a garden bright with flowers. Dunster was on the sea, getting closer to her every hour.

He was at Foyle again. It was little Anne, the child, now sitting on his knee in the big schoolroom chair by the open window. Her hair had been brushed and her hands washed for a meal, and she wore a clean starched pinafore that fell in stiff folds. A gong sounded and they went downstairs together, her hand in his.

He was leaning over her bed, Anne at his side holding a shaded candle, and speaking in whispers. Her dark hair was spread over the pillow, one hand was under her cheek, the other lay on the coverlet. Her lashes quivered, and Anne said, "Hush!" Her dark eyes slowly opened, were wide for a moment, and then they closed again; there was a smile on her lips. Anne touched the bedclothes, and they crept softly out of the room.

He stirred where he sat, and a sound of pain broke

from his lips, as this memory came to him, more vivid than the rest. Not for years had he allowed himself to dwell upon what he had lost. He had thought that by keeping his mind closed against it he might in time be able to think of the happiness of his early years, and of those whom he had loved, with a tender regret, and gain solace from his thoughts, as he had done before his marriage. But ten years had gone by, and the sense of loss was as poignant as ever.

And yet there was a difference. He knew instinctively that the time had come for him to face the trouble that was wrecking his life, to make up his spiritual account, and to leave the spot to which he had been drawn again, as it seemed by something outside himself, with some clear idea as to where he stood, towards himself and towards others.

He raised his eyes and looked across the water to the deep-grassed orchard that bounded the pool, and for the first time since he had lost her threw open the gates of his mind for Margaret's entrance there, conjuring up her figure as he had seen it under the gnarled boughs of the apple trees, when after crossing the water she had come back to be nearer to him again before he left her. And, as he did so, he found that her image was supportable, that it had even faded a little. The pang which he had invited was less sharp than the pain of his recent thoughts, and as he renewed it, by grasping out at all the sweet memories of her that he had so long avoided, its recurrent bitterness became always less; and presently the tender regret which he had

hoped for took the place of the pain, and the familiar scene soothed and comforted him, suffused once more with the light and form and colour of its summer beauty.

It was almost happiness to be able to think of her like this. She had gone out of his life as completely as those others whom he had loved had gone out of it. They were dead, and she was alive, but he had no expectation of seeing her again, nor had he ever wished it. A short time after her marriage her grandfather had left the mill, and shortly after that Gillett had told him that it was open to him to buy it, on condition that the man who had worked it should be continued as its tenant. This man lived there still, alone; and the mill was as much cut off from the social life of the village as it had ever been. The Pastons were forgotten in Wyse.

Hugh found himself thinking of her, without any bitterness or shrinking, as she would be now. Had she been happier than he in the marriage to which she had given herself, perhaps as a weakness of her woman's nature, craving protection and dependence, perhaps out of gratitude, perhaps to put a barrier between herself and her frustrated happiness? Had she had children? Was her husband, who had been old when she married him, still alive? He might at least find that out, from some work of clerical reference. But otherwise he had no desire to make inquiries about her. She would be a woman now, in her sweet maturity, more to be loved than ever if she had come to it by his side and he

could have watched the slow change in her, finding always something new to love and to rest himself upon. But their ways had lain apart, and he had forbidden himself to think of what might have been. The image in his mind now was wholly that of the girl she had been, and however her sweetness had developed she was that no longer.

The past was over and done with. He could dwell on it now in memory as something ineffably sweet, and cherish it in his mind without pain. The happiness that might have sprung from it was not his even to imagine. He had schooled himself so far as no longer to desire it.

He sat for a long time solacing himself with the freedom of spirit that had come to him because at last he had faced his trouble. But he had not yet faced the whole of it. If the loss of Margaret, whom he had loved, was no longer to be a burden upon his life, there was still his life to be faced to the end with Mabilia, whom he had never loved. Was there no way of lightening that burden for himself—and for her?

Yes, for her. Some memory of Margaret—some word or phrase she had used about trusting all her happiness to him—unexpectedly brought him to this testing-point. Whatever enlightenment had come to him concerning Mabilia's desires in marriage, he had given her precious little chance of building upon any others. If it was true that love had had very little to do with her acceptance of him, it was yet no very great crime on her part to have ex-

pected the sort of advantage from marriage that went most with the ideas of life in which she had been brought up. He had visited that discovery upon her harshly, even before he had known Margaret, in withdrawing himself in spirit from her; but they might have come together in the way he had pictured to himself, if he had made allowances. Afterwards he had held her coldly, and still more harshly, at arm's length, and visited upon her the wrecking of his own happiness, which was yet no fault of hers. He had given her what he had told himself she wanted from him, and withheld everything else. But now, what he had given her —so much more than she could have expected—was of no more use to her in bringing happiness than it was to him. How would it have been if he had given her something else?

Love? That had never been his to give her, and he had not asked, or even desired it from her. Then what had he offered her, and what had he expected in return?

The hope of children of his own had not been quite all that had impelled him towards marriage. They would have been her children as well as his, if the gift had been vouchsafed. Companionship and growing sympathy were to have sweetened his solitary life; he had thought that he might get them from her, and he had had some reason for his belief. In their walks together over the high moors and by the sea, in the first dawnings of their friendship, surely there had been something to build on, some foundation that had not been wholly destroyed by his discovery that she was not quite

what he had thought her! Was he himself, towards her, what she had thought him in those early days? Would she have married him, even, if she had known all the truth about him?

The sun declined, and all the sweetness of the summer evening hung about the retired and lovely place, which he had shunned as if it were a dark spot in all the beauty that surrounded his home. Now it was consecrated afresh to him. The spirit of love which had infused its bright and gentle charm had descended upon him again. The love had been, and remained as a guiding influence. All those upon whom he had expended love throughout his life had been taken from him; it was right to keep them in tender remembrance, but not right to shut up in his own breast his power of loving, and let it feed only upon memories. He saw that now, at the end of his long self-communing. The strong and tender love that he had felt for his sister, for her child, and for Margaret, should have opened his heart to all mankind, and not closed it against every emotion that would have taken him out of himself. There are many kinds and degrees of love, but all spring from the same divine source. His love for Margaret had been pure and uplifting, but he had turned it into a secret shame. Even his love for the dead child he had hugged jealously to himself. Surely he might have let Mabilia into that!

He knew what he had to do now, as he walked slowly home by the riverside, through the blossoming fields, and wondered whether after all it was too late to do it.

CHAPTER XXIII

BY THE WINDOW

The room in which Mabilia spent all her days, hugging her ailments and her disappointments, had an outlook on to the most beautiful of the gardens by which the house was surrounded. She was perhaps least discontented when the summer days allowed her to lie on her sofa by the open window and steep herself in the peace and beauty of it.

She lay there on this evening, later than her wont, and watched the light fade over the lawns and trees. Hugh had sent her a message to say that he was coming to her after dinner, if she felt well enough to talk to him. She did not want to talk to him, but thought that it would be less tiresome to do so if she could look out upon the scene that she loved, and watch the stars come out in the sky.

It was almost dark in the great room when Hugh came to her. He could see only the squares of light in the high windows as he shut the door, and her face and the hand that lay on her coverlet glimmering in the dusk. The chair in which he sat when he was with her was set by the head of the sofa, facing the window. She could not see his face without altering her position.

There was silence for a time, while she lay quite still and waited for him to speak.

"I have something to tell you," he said, in a low constrained voice; "something you ought to have known long ago."

She did not stir, but there was a sense of awakened attention, almost of shock, as again she waited.

He spoke in a voice almost monotonous. "When I came down here first," he said, "ten years ago, I met Margaret Paston, who lived at the mill with her grandfather. I fell in love with her. I would have married her, but when she found out that I was engaged to marry you, she wouldn't. I never saw her again, and, as you know, she married herself and went away soon after we came to live here. It was all ended—ended for ever—when I went back to London; and soon afterwards we were married."

There was a slight pause, but not long enough for Mabilia to have said anything, if she had wished to do so. He went on again, but in a voice a little more hurried, and with more life in it.

"It was ended, that is, for any communication of any sort between her and me. I know nothing about her life since she went away from here. I have not heard her name mentioned for years. Until this afternoon I have never been to the mill, where we first met, and loved each other."

He came to a sudden stop, though this had seemed only the introduction to something he had meant to say.

"She loved you?" Mabilia asked in a colourless voice.

"Yes."

There was a long pause. Both of them were absolutely still—so still that the fluttering of a moth against the half-shut window pane sounded like the fluttering of a bird.

"That explains many things," said Mabilia, in the same detached voice as before. "I wish you had married her and not me."

Again a long silence; and then Mabilia said: "You had no right to marry me if you loved somebody else. . . . Or at least you ought to have told me."

"Yes," he said at once. "I ought to have told you. It has taken me ten years to see that. I saw it very plainly this afternoon. . . . And now I have told you."

She stirred on her couch, and again there was a long silence, until he saw her hand move, and knew that she was crying.

Still he sat without speech. His confession seemed to have emptied his mind of all emotion. He was faintly surprised that she should take it in this way, for he had expected that she would be bitter and scandalized; but her tears did not move him to sympathy with her.

She dried her eyes. "I don't know why you've told me this now," she said. "I suppose it was to put yourself right with your conscience. I don't want to sneer at that; I think it is a good thing to do. You've been horribly cruel to me, though I suppose everybody who knows us would say that you were a model husband, and all the unhappiness of our married life has been my fault."

He had admitted to himself that he had been cruel to her, but the accusation struck at him none the less.

"I have sometimes reproached myself with the unhappiness," she went on. "I have wondered what I ought to do, for I have a conscience too, and I try to follow it. Now I know that I could have done nothing. You shut yourself up against me before we were married, and, whatever I might have tried to be to you, you would have repulsed me. You have been thinking of this other woman all the time—all these years. You're thinking of her still. You say you know nothing about her now; but I do, as it happens. Her husband died some years ago. If I were to die, there would be nothing to prevent your marrying her. It's the best thing I can do. I've nothing to live for."

She broke into sobs, but controlled herself quickly.

"I'm not going to make myself ill," she said. "But I wish you'd go away, now you've told me. There doesn't seem to be anything more to say."

"Yes, I think there is," he said quietly. "Much of what you say is true, and I have already said it to myself. It is because of that that I have come to you. What happened ten years ago was something outside of myself, that came to me without any exercise of will or intention of mine. I'm not sure that it was even wrong; but if it was I couldn't help myself. Where I have been wrong is in not facing it. From the time I turned away from her, to take what I thought was the right course, I have shut my mind as far as I could

to memories of her. Now at last I have opened it, and I find that the love itself is only a memory. I couldn't have told you anything if I were still cherishing it. I have told you because it has been between us all these years, and now it is cleared away."

"You have found that you don't love her any more?" She asked the question in a tone almost of curiosity.

"It isn't quite like that," he said, after a pause; and hesitated again before he went on: "I hope you will accept it when I say that my purpose in coming to you is not, as you said just now, to put myself right with my conscience; it is to put myself right, as far as that is possible, with you. If I have been cruel to you, as you say I have, I ask your forgiveness. I know, at least, that the unhappiness to which the lives of both of us have been brought has been my fault. I see that now; and if one sees the wrong in oneself and turns away from it . . . it ought not to be beyond mending."

"I can't imagine your falling in love," she said, as if she had not heard this. "It's an extraordinary story altogether. And you say that she refused to marry you, when she knew about me. Did she know who you were? But of course she did. Oh, I'm not going to make a grievance of it, Hugh. I suppose it happens like that, to men. Of course I knew you didn't love me when you asked me to marry you. I don't know whether I loved you or not. I hardly remember. I suppose I didn't; but I know if you'd treated me well I might have done so. You never gave me a chance. At any rate you didn't want it. I remember telling mother

once that I believed you would hate it more than anything if I did."

Again she burst into sobs, and this time he did feel sympathy with her, though it was the faintest of emotions. "I'm sorry," he said; "sorry for everything, Mabilia. I've had a disappointed life, and I've drawn you into it. I've sacrificed you to my regrets and frustrated hopes. It was very wrong. Is it too late to put some of it right, and make the best of the years that are left to us? We're hardly past our youth yet. We have a great deal that most people would think the chief thing to bring happiness. I've lived almost entirely for myself for years past—perhaps all my life; though at first I didn't love myself more than I loved others."

"Oh, I've lived for myself too," she said. "There's been nobody else to live for. You needn't take all the blame to yourself. There's one thing, though, that you might take into consideration about me. If I had wanted nothing but wealth and position and the sort of life that comes from them to make me happy, I shouldn't be living as I am now, almost always alone."

He considered this in his mind. It was a new light to him on her character. It was true that she might have had everything that he had thought of her as wanting in life, and that she had tried most of it, and got tired of it all.

"What is it then that you do want?" he asked, with gentleness.

"Oh, how do I know?" she said, with a gesture of her hands. "It's so long since I thought of you as

being willing to give me anything beyond what you felt yourself obliged to give me. But whether I loved you or not, before you could have given me very much, it was your companionship that attracted me. There wasn't much else to be gained then from marrying you."

There was a long pause. The soft night air, sweet with all the scents of the blossoming earth, stole in on them, the breathing stillness wrapped them round. It was a time and a place that would have made for the tenderest happiness if their hearts had been in accord with one another. But heaviness was upon them with all the weight of their dead hopes and desires. Was there anywhere a gleam of spiritual light?

Hugh raised his eyes to the stars, which now shone brightly in the dusky canopy of night. "Isn't it possible to begin again?" he said—"to begin again where I made the mistake of not trusting you? We had something in common before then."

"What do you mean—that you made a mistake about me?" she asked, with a note of surprise in her voice.

"Wasn't it when I found that you didn't want to cut yourself off from the sort of life that you had lived with your mother? Wouldn't you, after all, have been ready to live a quieter life with me, if I had pressed you, and been patient with you?"

"Oh, Hugh!" she said. "If you have thought about me like that!"

She broke down and cried again, and this time his

sympathy with her tears was real. He put out his hand, and she took it and pressed it. "I was sorry for that almost immediately," she said. "I told mother so. I believe it would have been quite different if I hadn't disappointed you then. If you've remembered that, and seen the truth, you must know that there is something in me that you might have cared for."

He was moved by this—to compunction for his hard impatience with her, and pity for her weakness. Her hand still lay in his, and she let it lie there, as if she drew something from his hold of it. "If you hadn't shut me out!" she said. "I know how much you loved your sister, and the little child that died. That has always parted us, but it might have brought us together. I suppose you have always wanted love. What you've told me tonight—I don't think it would have happened if you hadn't already withdrawn yourself from me. I won't make a grievance of it, Hugh. It sha'n't come between us, if you really want us to come together again at last. No, I'm sure that your telling me about it means that you do. It was years ago. I'm not even jealous of her. I never had that to give you, and we need not pretend that we're going to fall in love with one another now, after missing the way so badly at first, and for so long. But we ought to be friends. We've never even been that, you know, since the very first. Yes, I do want it, Hugh. Only you mustn't keep me out any more. You must let me into something that you feel. I don't think it's beyond me to feel something of it with you."

He rose and went to the window, where he stood looking out on to the beauty of the starlit garden.

"On a night like this," he said slowly, "Anne and I once sat in the garden at Foyle, and wondered what life was going to bring us. We felt the beauty of the world as we had never felt it before. We thought we could never be happier. Afterwards she had great happiness, and great sorrow, and then she died. And the child I loved so much—she felt the beauty of the world too, but she was taken away from it. What does it all mean? In the light of love it seems to mean so much, without it so little."

He turned towards her. "It means more to me tonight than it has for years," he said. "Some of the mists have cleared away from it."

"I feel it too," she said quietly. "It has been a consolation to me to lie here, while I have been ill, and to drink it in. It's something that we have in common, Hugh. It hasn't been so much to me as it has to you. I have never known great happiness, or great sorrow, only great discontent. If you're going to be kind to me, and think of me a little . . . if I get better . . ."

She broke off and wept again. Her nurse came in, with protests at her keeping up so late, and, when she saw her tears, showed some indignation against Hugh, who took it quietly enough. He knew that Mabilia would not suffer harm from her tears.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Mabilia and her mother were sitting together, busy with their needlework, in the garden of Wyse Hall. The air was hot and still, but not without freshness. A smooth expanse of lawn stretched in front of them, bounded by the western front of the beautiful ancient house, which for centuries had enshrined the home life of its owners, and pointed their appreciation of its quieter pleasures. The bees were droning among the flowers, and provided the only sound that broke the brooding peace of the summer morning.

Mrs. Churton's hair was white, but she was still active and erect, and decisive in speech and manner. And Mabilia looked actually younger than when she and Hugh had talked together on that summer night five years before. There were no signs of the invalid about her now, and on the grass a little way from where they were sitting was a child's wooden cart, and near it a child's painted horse. Motherhood had come to her, and brought happiness with it. She no longer had time, or inclination, to hug ailments, and they had departed from her.

Mrs. Churton, who had been accustomed throughout life to announce herself as unable to understand, or even to approve of, the prevailing fashion of making

a fuss about very young children, had fallen a victim to the fascinations of her grandson, but had never yet been brought to acknowledge that there was any discrepancy between her present and her former attitude. She was defending herself vigorously this morning against the charge pressed with raillery by Mabilia of being just like any other doting grandmother.

"It is not in the least like that," she was saying vigorously. "Little Richard is a remarkable child. I should say the same if he belonged to anybody else but you. If he were like the ordinary run of children I should put up with him *because* he was yours, and do what I conceived to be my duty towards him, and there it would end. What is the time, Mabilia? I have not got my watch on."

Mabilia laughed. "It is not time to wake him yet," she said. "I wish you had spoilt me a little when I was a child, mother, as you spoil Richard. It wouldn't have done me any harm."

"To say that I spoil Richard is simply untrue," said Mrs. Churton. "I love the child; that is only natural in my position towards him. And no child is the worse by being surrounded by love, if it is wisely exercised. It was in your case, but there was a great deal of nonsense in you from the first, which I did my best to eradicate. The result was that you grew up a companion to me, instead of a nuisance, as many girls of the modern day are to their mothers. Some of the nonsense returned after you were married, but as you seem

to have got rid of it now, I will say no more about that, except that my bringing up was justified."

Mabilia laughed again. "It's all rather different, isn't it?" she said. "Life is worth living now."

"Life is always worth living," said Mrs. Churton. "It has always, certainly, been worth living for you, with all you have had at your command, and the pity of it is that you wasted so many years of it in thinking yourself hardly used, when you were so much more fortunate than most. It is true that Hugh has changed completely since the child was born, and is now much easier to live with than he was. But he was never really so difficult as you made out, and even if he had been, you had all the rest, and as far as I know he never put any obstacles in the way of your enjoying it."

"No, he didn't," said Mabilia, speaking more seriously. "I had everything that I should have thought I could possibly want, and after a time I found that I didn't care for any of it. It was a curious discovery for a woman brought up as I had been."

"That is meant for a reflection upon me, I suppose. You're so much higher in the world than your mother that you can forget how much she had to do with preparing you for the place that has fortunately come to you. However, we needn't spar about that. The whole change in you has been brought about by your having a child. It is so with many women. Men too! Look how it has changed Hugh! He has even got rid of some of his solemnity. He has got rid of *all* his disagreeableness. How *intensely* disagreeable he was at the time

of your marriage! With all this just come to him, and married to the woman he had chosen out of all others, one would have said that he was a bitterly disappointed man, for whom life held nothing at all. I have often thought it over since, and that is just how it has appeared to me."

"That's just what he was, poor Hugh! I didn't know much about him then, or for long afterwards. I had thought a great deal about what I wanted for myself, and very little about what I could give him."

"Well, I suppose you would have given him a child, which was the chief thing he wanted, if you could. But he couldn't know that you would not have one for so many years when he married you. I've never understood his attitude at that time. You're so much more in his confidence than you used to be, Mabilia. Haven't you ever asked him what the trouble was then? Was it just that he had bound himself to marry you when he was poor, and afterwards thought he might have done so much better for himself, with all he had to offer?"

Mabilia smiled. "You don't put a very high value upon what you had made of me, after all," she said. "I don't believe you've ever thought, mother, that love is the chief thing in marriage, and that nothing else counts much beside it."

"Oh, love!" said Mrs. Churton. "I don't picture you as exactly pining for love when Hugh proposed to you. You thought it was just good enough then, and by a miracle of luck it became much more than good enough later. I like to face such questions as this di-

rectly. If Hugh had ever thonght of himself as in love with you, he had most certainly got rid of the idea by the time you were married, as he showed plainly enough. Yours was not a love match, Mabilia, on either side; but though one was very doubtful about it for a long time, it has turned out well in the end, as so many marriages do that don't begin with roses and raptures. You've become good friends, and Hugh has turned into an extremely kind and thoughtful husband; but all the same it's a little late in the day to begin talking about love."

"Perhaps it is," said Mabilia, with a sigh. "And yet, I don't know. I'm not at all sure that I don't love Hugh, though I'm quite sure that I didn't when I married him, or for many years afterwards. He is very kind to me; he is a man that everybody must respect, and perhaps admire. I admire and respect him, at any rate; and he is the father of my child whom we both do love. What I do know is that I *could* have loved him at the beginning."

"Well, I don't know what there was to prevent you. From what you say, I should think that you may have come to love him in some sort of fashion; and probably he could make you love him as much as most wives love their husbands at your age, if he wanted it. The trouble is that very few men do, when they get past the early stages, and Hugh never even went through them. What you can say is that he has accepted his lot, and it is quite likely that he has come to feel some sort of affection for you. If he behaves well towards you, it is just as true that you behave well towards him. I have ob-

served it with pleasure, for you didn't always. You have both something substantial to go upon, but if you were to press me from now till doomsday I shouldn't call it love."

"I don't want to press you. And yet it is love, after all. Perhaps not for each other. We made a false start, and we can't go back to the beginning. But we both love our child. He's the chief thing in the lives of each of us. Otherwise it would just be accepting the second best, and making the most of it as long as we lived, and not caring much when the time came to leave it."

"I shouldn't call it the second best myself; but it's true that both of you did your utmost to make it so. I don't take any exception, though, to your finding it all made worth while by the child. It would have been dismal enough to have grown old here, with nobody to come after you that you cared anything about."

"There's a great deal in that, mother—more than you mean by it, I think. It seems to me as if neither Hugh nor I matter very much now, for ourselves. We've had the greater part of our lives, and we've made little of them—poor Hugh especially. And it hasn't been his fault, as perhaps it has been mine. It's as if he had been the sport of fate all along. He has had great things given him, but always they seem to have come at the wrong time, and he has lost them one after the other; or if he has kept them they have been of no value to him. But now they are of value, because of his little son. But they're nothing beside Richard himself.

It is he that has brought Hugh to anchor at last. Oh, if only he's spared to us! If Hugh were to lose him, as he has lost everybody else he has loved——!"

"That's a foolish way of talking, Mabilia," said Mrs. Churton authoritatively. "Where is your religion? God has given you a great gift. Be thankful to Him for it and make the most of it. We all have our lives to live, and must expect sorrow as well as joy in them. There's no such thing as a man being the sport of fate."

THE END

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